SHORT STORIES

No. 775.] Week ending November 7. 1903. [Price One Penny.

"He held out a paper. It offered £100 reward to the person who arrested me!"

(A Very Striking Incident from "THE PURSUIT OF SARA." See inside.)

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 775.] Week Ending November 7th, 1903. [One Penny.

Fascinating New Series. **Start To-day.**

THE PURSUIT OF SARA

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences, was a typine in the firm of Templeton & Co.

The partners in the firm, Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr, treated Sara most courteously, especially the senior partner, who, before very long, induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

Noel was the nephew of Sir Francis Masterman, who in his will left him a thousand pounds. With this money he intended to buy a doctor's practice, and to give up the situation he was holding, that of medical attendant to a gentleman who was travelling on the Continent.

He came home to England on the death of the Baronet, but was soon recalled by telegram to Nice, as his patient had shown bad symptoms.

Noel was, however, loth to give up the idea of purchasing the practice he had in view, so, leaving the thousand pounds with them in notes, he signed a document authorising Templeton & Co. to act for him.

By a piece of trickery the firm converted this into a document authorising them to deal *with his whole estate.* He was heir to the baronetcy, in the event of the present holder of the title, Sir Herbert, his cousin, having no heir.

The next day Sara overheard the three partners gloating over the probable success of their schemes.

Then she was amazed and horrified to hear Shackell relate how, posing as Sir Herbert's valet, he had murdered the baronet in cold blood, and had been most careful to leave no clues behind him.

Little by little she understood the full meaning of the vile plot the scoundrels had in hand.

Her betrothed was now Sir Noel Masterman, and Templeton & Co. had full power over his estate!

She resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she eluded her astounded employers, seized the precious papers, and fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, she had about five pounds with her. Sara wired to Noel to return at once, and then she took train to Bedford.

While there a murderous attack was made on her by Rigby Starr, disguised as a nurse.

He endeavoured to push Sara into the river by Newnham Bridge, but in his eagerness he was nearly drowned himself.

Sara escaped, and, still retaining the all important paper relating to her lover's inheritance, made her way to Northampton.

Templeton & Co., she knew, would leave no stone unturned to find her; no course would be too desperate for them to take in order to regain the document.

At Northampton Sara rescued a little boy from death, and thereby gained the devoted friendship of a young girl namep Maggie Dunkley. To her she confided all her troubles.

While strolling in Abingdon Park, Sara encountered a villainous-looking man with red-hair.

She was told that he was a keeper in a lunatic asylum, and later she found out that Noel was detained as a patient in that asylum!

Madly she intreated for his release, but all in vain! Then the red-haired man told her that he would aid Noel to escape, and told Sara to be on the racecourse the next morning at five o'clock.

Thence Sara went. Suddenly she was seized from behind! Before her, she saw Noel gagged and bound! A man was holding a pistol to his head, and a voice exclaimed:

"Tell me where the papers are before I count ten, or—your lover dies!"

The speaker was Harrington Shackell!

Suddenly she saw a man on horseback galloping towards her. How could she gain time, till her possible rescuer could reach her? "Help," she screamed.

"Eight," said Shackell, and the trigger of the pistol held to Noel's head was raised.

The horseman spurring his steed drew nearer.

"Nine! Is he to die?" cried Shackell.

Sara tried to answer, but her voice was strangled in her throat. Only a hoarse murmur came from her lips. She could not speak; she could not even make a sign.

A second, but a second, and her love must die!

Ten—and the fatal shot was to be fired!

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The Pursuit of Sara

HEMMED IN AT LEICESTER.

At the last moment with the word—that fatal "ten," the signal for my lover's death—trembling on Shackell's lips, a conviction, strange and startling, came to me. Something, perhaps a turn of his head, maybe a look in his eyes, or, as I like to think, the intuition of my love, laid bare the fact that the man at whose head the pistol was pointed *was not Noel!*

With a cry I broke from my captors.

"Fire!" I shouted; and again "Fire! That's not Noel Masterman, whoever he may be!"

For a second a blinding fear that after all I was mistaken, sent the world spinning. The next, Shackell turned on Noel's substitute and reviled him.

The other, throwing the loosely knotted cords from arms and chest, replied in kind. The two had almost come to blows, when Shackell, suddenly remembering, missed me.

"Where's the girl?" he yelled, striking at his men who stood about, idly regarding him. Then, as he caught sight of my vanishing figure, "Hurry, make haste, she must not get away. Confound you, why don't you run, you miserable idiots!"

Heading the chase he raced across the turf. Swift he might be, but I was lighter-footed. The horseman I had seen in the distance came nearer, closer, stopped.

"Up you get, missie!" Jim Goodman's strong arm swung me lightly to the saddle before him. "Now, then, Tom," to the boy who ran beside him, "get back and tell my girl the lady's safe. Off!" He waved his whip, shook the reins on the brown mare's neck, and like the wind we tore away, until the shouts of Shackell and his crew grew like the yelping of a pack of hounds in the far distance.

"Maggie was bothered about you," he explained, when at length he judged it safe to draw rein and take a breathing space. "At five in the morning the race-course is a queer sort of place for a girl to go to, and she scented danger. She came down to me at the stables, roused me up, and started me and Tom off after you. I'm glad I came, too, they were a roughish-looking lot of chaps for you to be amongst, missie."

"I can never thank you enough for coming. You and Maggie."

"It's nothing," he remarked, as though he had rescued persecuted people from his birth upwards. "I'd do more than that, for anyone who'd been a good friend to my Maggie."

"Where do you think I had better go, Jim?" I asked.

"You mustn't come back to Northampton, that's certain," he answered, "unless"—his voice grew hard—"unless you ride straight to the police-station and give those chaps in charge."

"I can't do that," I faltered. "I *daren't!* It may seem strange to you, but indeed it's no wrong or shameful reason that stops me. Maggie knows," I added, "and she approves."

"If she thinks it's all right, missie, I won't say any more. All the same it would be a deal simpler to go to the court and have 'em put in gaol, than to run away. The chances are they'll find you out again, so I understood Maggie to tell me, and then what are you going to do?"

"I can do nothing but hope and, and—fight," I answered, my voice shaking. "It's not for my own sake, Jim, but for my sweetheart's. I have something belonging to him, something I took—or, as they say, stole—from his enemies, the people who pursue me. I daren't go to the police, all I can do is to fight on and on until he comes back. Until——" A sudden fear made me start and all but overbalance.

"The papers, Jim!" I gasped. "I left some papers with Maggie before I came out."

"Here they are, missie, all safe and sound. Maggie gave them to me the last thing. If you don't mind, I'd rather she didn't have the keeping of them any more, miss. What I can do for you myself I will, but if *she* should come to any harm——"

"Don't worry," I interrupted. I promise you Maggie shall run no further risks."

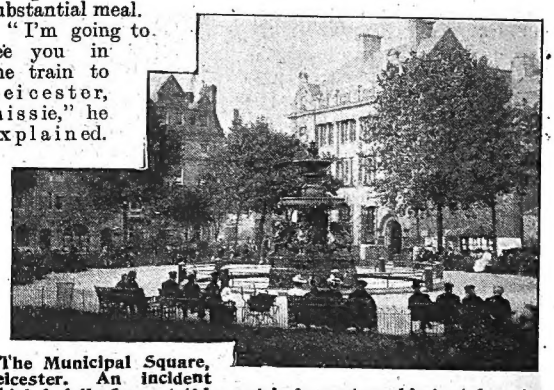
Jim murmured his thanks, and tried somewhat awkwardly to excuse himself for his anxiety. I did not aid him in his endeavours but let him flounder in a sea of apology. I acknowledged the justice of his request, but I was hurt none the less on its account. It seemed as if I were destined to be a sort of female Ishmael, outcast and alone.

At Jim's suggestion I dismounted at a little country inn some miles out of the town, where, he said, I might in safety spend the rest of the day.

"The landlady knows me and Maggie," he explained; "as a friend of ours she'd be pleased for you to stay. I'll tell her you've been travelling and want some hours' rest."

I was shown to a room at the top of the house, and, flinging myself on the bed, fell into a deep sleep, from which I did not wake till close on six o'clock. At seven the faithful Jim reappeared, and under his care I descended to the coffee-room and partook of a substantial meal.

"I'm going to see you in the train to Leicester, missie," he explained.



The Municipal Square, Leicester. An incident which befalls Sara at this spot is in next week's instalment.

"I'd advise you to go to a hotel for to-night, it will be safer for you than lodgings. The bigger the place the more people in it, and the less chance for anyone to kidnap you. Meanwhile, here's five pounds from me and Maggie, which you can pay us back when better times come. It'll keep you going for a bit. If you want more you must let us know. You'll write to Maggie?"

"Of course; directly I get to Leicester. Do you think it wise to go to such a large place?"

"Much safer than a smaller one. Besides, from Leicester you can keep in touch with us. Maybe a letter will come from your sweetheart, and we should want to bring it on at once."

I thanked him for his kindness, and sent many messages of love and gratitude to Maggie. At any rate I left Northampton less forlorn than when I came. I had found friends, faithful, loving-hearted people to whom I could turn in distress, sure of help and sympathy.

It seemed a long run from Northampton to Leicester, and in spite of my day's rest I felt terribly fagged when, dazed by the clatter and din of the big station, I found myself at my journey's end.

Mindful of Jim's instructions, I appealed to the porter, who seized on my bag with the avidity of a bird of prey, and asked if he could recommend me a hotel.

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He glanced me up and down, and after a moment's thought, suggested that there was a temperance hotel opposite the station.

Visions of "Pearce and Plenty," eminently clean but to my mind inhospitable, rosebefore me.

"I don't much like temperance hotels," I faltered.

"There's the George, but"—he paused, "you're very young," he said with a fatherly shake of the head; "you'd better go to the Temperance," and shouldering my bag—Maggie's last gift—he led the way up many flights of stairs out into the street, across the road, and into the hall of the hotel.

I was located in a room at the top of the house, at the extreme end of a very long corridor. Furnished in the approved fashion of hotels, lit by a dim gas burner, the surroundings were not calculated to rouse my drooping spirits. However, I felt better after supper, and lay down to rest with a quieter mind than I had hoped to enjoy.

I awoke some hours later, my heart beating violently, my nerves a quiver, my whole being stirred by the sense of danger. I started up, crouching on the side of my bed. What had roused me? In what subtle fashion had my nerves been quickened to a consciousness of peril?

In the silence of the night, far, far down the corridor, I heard a soft, shuffling sort of tread. Nearer it came and nearer, each second hastening its approach. Frozen with the fear that comes in the night watches, I shivered, clasping my fingers round my throat that I might feel the contact of warm, living flesh.

What was it, man or beast? that shuffled down the corridor. My room—the last—lay at the end of an abrupt turn in the passage, and was some yards distant from the rest. As I realised this I remembered with a dismay so sharp as to cause physical pain *that I had not locked my door!*

I could not move. A wild fear that even as I reached the door and grasped the key, *the thing* would fall upon me, kept me still.

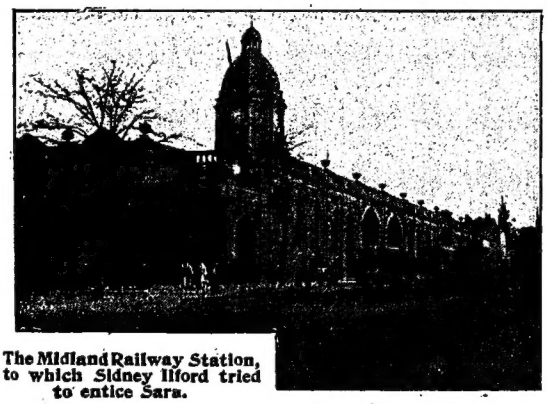
Slowly the curious, halting feet came along the corridor. Another minute they will reach my threshold; and then——?

I glance round for the bell, to reach it I must cross the room. It hangs upon the other side of the fireplace. I cannot stir. I cannot!

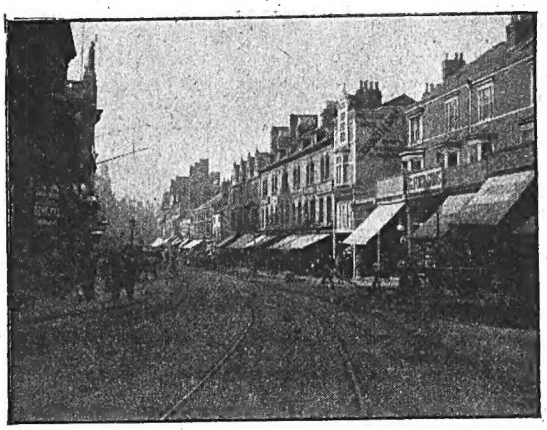
With the last effort of a rapidly paralysing will, I throw myself off the bed. Turning the key, I grasp it tightly and creep back, hiding under the clothes.

The steps pause outside my room. The door is softly tried, and in the silence I seem to catch the murmur of an oath at its resistance. Then comes a scratching on the paint. I throw back the bedclothes, and cautiously sit up. The dim light that streams through the window is suddenly intensified. The moon emerging from a cloud illumines the sky, and casts its beams with lavish splendour on the earth. In the clear, cold radiance the door shines silver. Fascinated, I watch the beams fall lower, lower till they reach the floor.

And there, ghostly and lean in the strange light, beneath



The Midland Railway Station, to which Sidney Ilford tried to entice Sara.



Granby Street, to which Sara went in order to dispatch a telegram to Maggie, telling her of her arrival.

the lintel of the door, curved upward, inward, like the talons of a bird of prey, stretched the *four fingers and a thumb* of a man's right hand.

It seems to my excited fancy that the door rises with the strain, that the fingers pressing with such cruel strength will lift it from its hinges. I hardly dare to breathe, the slightest sound may thwart my purpose.

Noiselessly and with infinite precaution I make my way to the dressing-table and feel for a dagger-shaped hatpin, which, sharp as a knife, is a valuable weapon of defence.

This hand that seeks to steal my lover's property—for that I feel is responsible for its appearance—shall not go empty away.

I stoop down by the door, poising the weapon carefully. And then with a quick movement stab the fingers with my pin. Bleeding and maimed, they are withdrawn, the footsteps shuffle back along the corridor—I am alone.

Reflection decided me that I had better keep silence as to my midnight adventure. Once again I must refrain from seeking help against my pursuers. Two attempts had already been made upon my life, as many upon my, or rather Noel's, property. All had failed. But the next—I sighed, my heart grew heavy. I decided not to leave Leicester, despite my fears. Hitherto I had fled before my enemies. This time I resolved to reverse my methods. I would stay in Leicester and defy the firm of Templeton and Co. to do their worst.

It was evident they did not intend to summon the law to their assistance; had they contemplated appealing to the police I should have been under arrest long since. They seemed to rely upon their strength and cunning to regain possession of the documents. It remained for me to defeat them by the power of love.

From the hotel I found my way down Granby Street, populous and bustling, to the Post Office, where I dispatched a wire to Maggie telling her of my safe arrival. My next call was at Wheeldon's, a large stationer's, with well stocked windows. My errand was to ask for employment. In a town like Leicester there must surely be a demand for typines. I was a skilled operator, and ought not to find a difficulty in getting a situation—until Noel returned.

The assistant stared somewhat at my request, and assured me there was no opening in that establishment, nor so far as he knew in any other.

Much depressed, I was turning to leave the shop when a customer at the other end of the counter came forward.

He had overheard my question. If I would forgive his interference he thought it possible he might be of use!

This, punctuated with smiles, and bows and flourishes of neatly gloved hands.

Very tall, with a slight, willowy figure, a fresh coloured face and a neat black moustache, despite his good looks and ingra-

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This is "The New Walk," Leicester. At this spot Sara had a most exciting adventure with Templeton himself, which will be fully described next week.

tiating manner the stranger did not favourably impress me. I looked him up and down, however, searched in vain for any trace of a likeness between him and one of the three partners, and finally decided he was well-meaning, if effusive.

"I heard only yesterday that Messrs. Cooper Corah, the big manufacturers, had a vacancy in their establishment for a young lady clerk. You might call at the office and inquire," he bowed again. "You might be successful, at any rate, you could try, I suppose," he tapped his left palm with the slender fingers of his right. "I suppose you have references and all that sort of thing?"

"I can offer the highest testimonials," I replied in the words of a ready letter writer. "There need be no difficulty as to that."

The stranger smiled severely, offered me his card, and bowed himself into the street. I followed, gazing absently after his tall figure.

The card bore the name of Sidney Ilford, and the address of a London club. I put it in my pocket and turned my steps in the direction of St. Margaret's Works.

Progress was necessarily slow; the Corporation was engaged in electrifying the tram service, and the roads for the time had become trenches filled with workmen, digging, hammering, clanging iron against iron in one continuous shriek.

The footpaths, encumbered by rubbish, were barricaded by huge mounds of gravel, and piles of timber. Round the clock house the din was at its height. Groups of pedestrians fascinated by the scene watched from the pavement, a solid mass of humanity—blocking the traffic, through which one had literally to fight a way.

From Granby Street and Gallowtree Gate I turned up Church Gate, exchanging the tall, prosperous buildings, wide thoroughfares, and bustling air of life for the stereotyped rows of red brick dwellings sacred to the artisan and operative.

I did not take the quickest route to Cooper Corah's factory. I missed my way, forgot my directions, and finally found myself in the middle of Abbey Park, within sight of the factory chimneys, but separated from them by winding paths and waving trees. A charming spot, the Park has an individuality that marks it out from kindred places of recreation. In the centre of the most populous part of the town, it is environed, by a forest of chimney stacks, that—over the flower beds, bright with many-coloured blossoms, over the water sparkling iridescent in the sunshine—breathe heavy clouds of smoke. The air throbs with the pulsation of vast machinery, the wind is charged with odours strange, indescribable, vaguely reminiscent of burnt leather—yet neither smoke nor the close proximity of toil can wholly mar the green quietness of this place of peace. Wrested from the encroaching tide of commerce, it lies tranquil and serene, held in the heart of the city's turmoil.

After some little trouble I arrived at Cooper Corah's, a large, white looking factory busy with the hum of many voices. I was directed to the counting-house, where I inquired if the firm were in need of a careful and accurate typine.

The gentleman interviewing me shook his head and assured me there was no vacancy of the kind in the establishment.

I pleaded that he might have overlooked the fact that such assistance was desired, but his denial was even more emphatic.

I left the place depressed at my failure, and irritated that I should have been sent on a fool's errand. What object could the smiling idiot in the stationer's shop have had in telling me such a string of falsehoods? It was evident he had invented the whole story. Love of interference would not explain, nor yet a malicious turn for joking. Could it be—

I stopped short. It was impossible he could have any connection with Templeton and Co. There was nothing to be gained by sending me to Cooper Corah's, *they* at any rate were not in league with my former employers.

By this time I had reached the churchyard of St. Margaret's, through which there lies a footpath. The beautiful tower of the old church rising above the sad discoloured gravestones loomed dark and stately against a background of blue sky.

The stillness of the scene took hold of me; here, in this place of the dead, the fact that I had life seemed, for the moment, wonderful enough to balance all my troubles. And then, out of the stillness that surrounded me, there came the sound of dragging footsteps that shuffled softly down the path.

Where had I heard the tread? My heart contracted, I felt again the terror of the night. That soft and stealthy step had passed down the hotel corridor, had paused outside my door.

With a cry I turned and faced—Sidney Ilford!

"Were you successful in your application at Cooper Corah's, Miss Gillespie?" he said, smirking.

"How do you know my name?" I asked, moving away.

"For a very sufficient reason," he returned. "I will give you full particulars if you will grant me a few minutes' conversation."

"I have not time," I answered, catching at the first excuse. "I am in a hurry, I wish you——"

He stayed the word upon my lips. Gripping my arm with his left hand—he had good cause to spare his right—he bent his head so that his face was level with my own.

"If you are wise you will hear me now," he said.

"I do not know you," I answered. "Let me go," I raised my voice. "Help!" I cried, urged to desperation. "Help!"

"If you call again, as Heaven is above us, I'll whistle for a constable and give you into custody. On what charge?" he laughed insultingly. "The police will know, at all events," he sneered. "Such an accomplished thief as yourself cannot hope to escape recognition."

As he stopped, he took a paper from his breast pocket and handed it to me, still keeping a tight grip on my arm.

"Read," he said, "it will interest you."

From the document, in a printed notice, there stared at me a hideous and distorted likeness of myself! With a cry I grasped the paper tight, and read, my cheeks aflame, the description of my face and figure that succeeded.

"Height 5ft. 6in., broad shoulders, slim waist, small feet and ankles. Red hair, green eyes, large mouth, good teeth! Anyone giving such information as will lead to the apprehension of the above will be rewarded with £100."

"This bill——"

"Is one of many," my companion interrupted. "Before to-night they will stare at you from every hoarding, face you at every railway station, haunt you in every street. Go—if you like"—he loosened his grip upon my arm, "but if you do, before to-night you will be lodged in gaol."

"Who are you?" I asked again. "What have you to do with me?"

"I will answer both your questions, but not here. It is impossible to converse on weighty matters in the middle of a public footpath. Let us sit down," and he pointed to a seat close to the wall, against which, ranged in solemn fashion, a row of tombstones reared their heads.

It was futile to combat the suggestion; I must know where I stood in regard to this unexpected ally of my enemies before I could hope to defeat his attack.

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"I suppose you are employed by Templeton and Co.?" I asked, seating myself as far as possible from him.

"I am an agent of the firm," he answered cautiously, "and as such, I have heard of the disappearance of their late typine—with notes to the value of a thousand pounds."

"You will, if you please," I answered promptly, "drop this style of conversation and speak plainly, or not at all. I took the notes, also the paper that Noel Masterman was entrapped into signing. You know I took them, as you know also why I did so. You are aware, no doubt, that Messrs. Templeton and Co. have tried to murder and to rob me. They have failed as you"—I looked at his right hand—"have failed also. Don't trouble to deny it!" I cried angrily. "You tried to break into my room last night. Proof?" I laughed scornfully. "There," I answered, and struck at the fingers of his right hand with my glove.

"You shall pay for that," he snarled, the mask thrown off. "I vow you shall pay——"

"You waste time in threats," I interrupted. "Let us come to business. What are your—terms?"

"Either you deliver to me the bank-notes and the document signed by your lover, or you return with me to London to await Templeton's instructions."

"If I refuse?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Before night, I again repeat, the town will be flooded with these bills."

"I don't believe you. It would be too great a risk for the firm to have me arrested. I know too much."

He grinned maliciously.

"To have you arrested on the charge of stealing the notes and the document would be a foolish proceeding of which my employers are not capable. The charge preferred against you would be that of misappropriating some £5 of the money given to you for office expenses. In other words, embezzling the petty cash. How does that strike you, Miss Gillespie? What sort of defence would you, an absconding clerk, masquerading under false names, have to offer? Whatever charge you brought against your late employers would redound to your discredit, not to theirs. Besides"—he gave me a side look from his crafty eyes—"besides, nothing you said could be proved. It's not likely you're such a fool as to carry the papers about with you," he paused, and I felt his glance burn into mine. Not by so much as a tremor did I betray the anxiety the question caused me. If he gained a hint that at that moment I had the papers, he would—I knew it—close with me in a frantic attempt to gain them.

"No," I said calmly, "I'm not so silly as that. I'm like an advance agent, always a town ahead. I left the papers"—I paused as if confused, and bit my lip.

Mr. Sidney Ilford made a note of my slip, and no doubt decided to communicate with the firm's representative at Northampton, so soon as he was through with me.

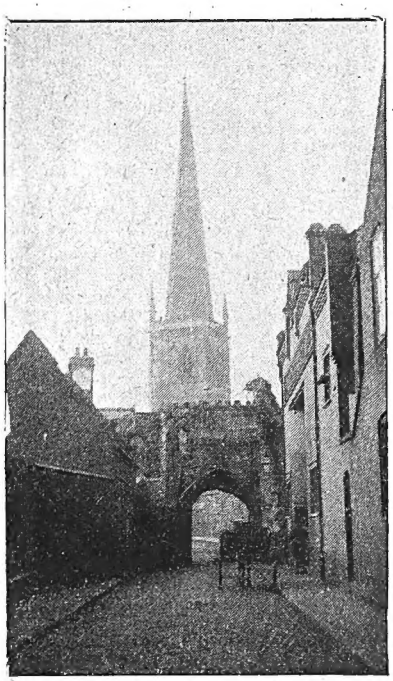
"Am I to give you in charge or not?"

"You haven't the power," I answered, fighting desperately. "I can prove you were not my employer."

"Pardon me," his suavity of manner had returned, "you are mistaken. As it happens I am a director of the company that employed you, and as such I can have you detained on suspicion. Once you are in confinement, if only for four-and-twenty hours, the game is ours. We know all your movements, where you went, with whom you stayed, since you left the office. We shall discover the whereabouts of the papers almost immediately. Meanwhile, you will be committed for trial on the evidence of the respected man of business, Mr. Templeton, found guilty, and sentenced to imprisonment."

"Against that you suggest I should accompany you to London? What advantage should I get from the latter course?"

"You would be spared the ignominy of a trial, and the disgrace of imprisonment. You know enough of the firm, Miss Gillespie, to understand that when I say you will be found guilty, such will be the case. There is, however, a third alternative; give me the notes," he stretched out his maimed right hand, "you can make better terms with me than Templeton. Tell me where the notes are to be found. And, and"—his face worked convulsively, his eyes shone with cupidity—"you can keep the paper," he said hoarsely. "I don't require that, it's the notes I want. Give them to me, and I will tell you where you can find your lover. It's the last chance you'll have, Miss Gillespie. Where are they?" He brought his face close to mine. "Only tell me and you shall be with Noel Masterman this afternoon."



Church Gate, at which point Sara made a daring and successful attempt to escape from Ilford.

The temptation to yield was terrible. All that I had endured, the terror, the pain, the agony of fright, the apprehension of discovery combined to weaken me. After all a thousand pounds was a small price to pay for happiness. Noel would not grudge ten times that amount. Should I consent? The eager face watched mine.

I turned upon my tempter fiercely.

"I will not give you the notes," I answered hotly.

"Then——"

"Neither will you give me in charge," I interrupted. "I have made my choice. I elect to go with you to London. Come," and I rose prepared to accompany him.

My decision seemed to surprise, not to say disappoint him, and he wasted some time and eloquence in trying to induce me to accept his terms. At last, with a bad grace, he resigned himself to the inevitable and leaving the churchyard, linked his arm in mine, and led me in the direction of Granby Street.

"We'll go by the Midland," he said, "there's a fast train to London about one, I think."

It wanted but a quarter to the hour, yet he did not seem to hasten, and I judged he was in some perplexity how to act. It struck me as possible that Templeton might not be best pleased at the turn things had taken. Probably he was not in London; he might be engaged in some transaction in the provinces, which he would not care to leave.

In that case, I thought, it would be doing my former employer a kindness were I to make good my escape. That I had not the slightest intention of accompanying Mr. Ilford to London, I have, I trust, made sufficiently plain. I only watched my opportunity to break loose from my captor and take refuge in flight.

The opportunity came quickly. At the corner of Church Gate our progress was stopped by a dense mass of men and women watching the men at work upon the tram-lines. It was the dinner-hour, and every one curtailed their leisure to inspect the progress of the alterations.

In the middle of the crowd I threw my whole weight upon Ilford with such a sudden jerk, that, staggering, he involuntarily threw up his hand. Snatching my arm from his

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grasp, I flung myself heavily among the crowd around us. Rushing, dodging, I forced a way until I reached the front rank of the throng and essayed to make my way along the street.

Immediately Sidney Ilford yelled out the cry of "Thief, stop thief!" A thousand throats took up the cry, eager for pursuit as a pack of wolves. At the cry I changed my course, and, doubling like a hare, fled across the road; over the stones, the rails, the rubbish that made the way all but impassable I fought a path, until I reached the pavement on the other side.

There—Heaven bless him—some kind Samaritan made way for me, and tried to stop the chase, that, yelling at all top speed, came after me. Down Gallowtree Gate, the road growing clearer and my pursuers closer. Gasping I fled, Noel's name on my lips, Noel's paper at my heart.

Down Market Street, barely escaping the clutch of greedy hands, over the cobble stones into the Market-place, thronged with stalls. It was Saturday, and end to end they stood, loaded with meat and vegetables, sweetmeats and cakes—and everything the busy housewife wants to buy. My heart in my throat I dodged between the stalls, overturning bales of merchandise in my mad flight. There never was a busier market than Leicester upon Saturday. The place was packed, one could walk upon the people's heads. The chase let loose, charged marketers and stalls with a great rush so that neat, well-adorned barrows, thrown helter-skelter one against each other, collapsed and fell with a crash on the ground.

Meanwhile with panting breath I crept behind a large capacious stall hung with lace curtains of all sorts and prices. The proprietress, a stout comely woman, took pity on my frightened face.

"Here," she said shortly, and pushed me underneath a pile of goods stacked in a corner close against the awning By this time the pursuit had cooled; faced by infuriated hucksters, the friends of "justice" felt their enthusiasm abate. They slunk off rapidly, leaving Sidney Ilford to continue his search alone.

Once or twice I thought I heard his voice, and felt a chill run through me. Gradually, however, my apprehension died away, I emerged from my hiding place and sought my protector.

In the middle of my earnest thanks, a shout arose from the neighbouring streets.

"Fire," screamed the crowd. "Fire!" The cry was taken up, repeated on all sides. With one sweeping movement the crowd, gathering at the cry, poured down Gallowtree Gate and Granby Street, to where a thick cloud of evil smoke darkened the sky.

Yielding to the attraction wielded by the very name of "Fire," I abruptly left my shelter and hurried from the market to the blazing pile—a shoe factory in Campbell Street. The building was well alight. Luckily there was no fear of loss of life, all the hands had left the place an hour ago.

At last, however, a fire-engine made its appearance; ladders were run up against the building, and some attempt made to subdue the flames. By this time another engine appeared, and under the direction of a grey-bearded official, whom the crowd greeted as Superintendent Ely, the pumps were got to work.

But the fire had too firm a grip upon the place to give way easily. The air was dense with smoke, the flames shooting through the roof were fanned by a strong breeze, that cast the charred fragments of slate and brick upon the crowd below. The place was getting all too hot for safety. It occurred to me that from the back windows of the hotel I could command a safer view than from the street.

Pushing a path through the crowd, that somewhat stolidly lined the road, I made my way back to the hotel. The house was in an uproar, the factory was in too close proximity not to raise a feeling of alarm.

The corridors were dripping with water, exuding from the pipes that had been pressed into the service of the brigade. Through a landing window the glare in the sky was frightful to behold; I hurried up the staircase, fled down the corridor, into my little room—hot with the raging of the fire.

From my window I looked over the roof of the Post Office, from which a hose was playing on the burning pile. On the roofs of the adjoining building men stood shouting directions to the firemen. A huge sheet of flame, red-hearted, yellow-tipped, hung like a curtain between earth and sky. The water playing from all sides, seemed to have no effect. I thought the factory doomed. Engrossed with the sight, I hung over the window-sill,

The crowd watching the men at work on the tram lines.

and oblivious of all save the burning pile, did not hear soft steps outside my door. Not till the grating of the key in the lock *from the outside*, warned me of danger, did I realise what had happened. Sidney Ilford had traced me to the hotel and had fastened me a prisoner in my room!

For a moment I hesitated whether I should peal the bell and summon the assistance of the servants.

Ilford had possibly left the hotel either to communicate with Templeton or to fetch the police. My chance of escape lay in his absence. If I called for help it would mean a delay in leaving the place.

There was a telegram lying on my table. It read:

"Important news for you. Coming to-morrow.—MAGGIE."

News—that meant news of Noel. Maybe he was in England. Perhaps we would be with me to-morrow, nay this very afternoon. In a passion of joy, I kissed the precious words.

I was a prisoner in my room. Useless to try and force the lock, futile to ring the bell. There remained but one way of egress—the window. From a great height I looked down on slanting roofs of slate, slippery with water. To the left the factory blazed on high, to the right—I drew back, a scream of horror broke from my lips. From an adjoining building two men were manipulating a long ladder in the direction of the hotel. In the confusion of the fire, fearing that theirs would be the next house attacked, none paid heed to the doings of frightened householders, men pumped water, erected ladders, directed a hose as pleased them best. The ladder that slowly but surely was approaching the direction of my window was supported by a tall, square-shouldered man, under the directions of a man some years his senior. And in the two I recognised Richard Templeton and Harrington Shackell!

The ladder which reached my window was steadied into position. Try as I would I could not displace the iron that rested on the sill. A slight boyish figure set his foot upon the lowest rung. Rigby was coming towards me.

A sudden burst of smoke clouded my view, so hot, so close were the flames that they scorched my cheeks and seemed to burn my eyes.

When I looked again Rigby was nearer. I caught the gleam of a weapon in his hand.

"Help! Help!" I scream, and know no help can come.

And then, with blind fury I throw myself against the figure clambering now into the room.

(The Leicester episode concludes next week.)

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Faint Heart and Fair Lady.

How a Man Pleaded for his Friend.

ONCE Harry Tiverton and James Ridgemore were bosom friends. Something happened; they were never seen to speak again and they cut one another dead whenever they met. This is the curious story, never before related, of their estrangement.

One evening Tiverton sat in his sanctum—called by courtesy his study. He was a reader, a voracious reader, but chiefly of the lighter forms of literature. What life lacked for him in romance he found between the covers of novels.

Unannounced, as usual, Ridgemore entered. They warmly shook hands, and Tiverton pulled forward a second armchair. There was clearly a more than common understanding between them.

"You've been quite deserting me, Jim, of late."

"I've not dropped in this week, if that's what you mean."

"Nor last week either! What's been amiss?"

"I'll tell you. It's nothing very serious, but—let me light up first!"

Satisfied that his pipe was alight, Ridgemore continued:

"Something has occurred, Harry, which I reckoned entirely impossible."

"You've come into a fortune?"

"I suppose I have—a piece of good fortune anyhow."

"You're promised a rise at the office, eh?"

"Nothing so material! It's a trifle hard to tell you, old friend. Got a good novel there?"

"My dear chap, you make a statement that raises my curiosity to boiling point, and then calmly suggest taking up a book."

"I didn't mean that, Harry. You're a novel reader. You know something of the hearts of men—and women. I think you will understand me."

Tiverton looked at his friend with a perplexed air. His manner was mysterious and slightly nervous.

"I don't know you, Jim, in this serious mood."

"Nor I myself. The whole thing has just turned me upside down. The fact is—I am in love."

The candid and unexpected announcement caused Tiverton to edge his chair a couple of inches away in surprise.

"Don't shun me as though it were measles," the other humorously observed.

"You've astonished me—I confess it. But my congratulations are none the less sincere, Jim." He held out his hand. "When did the engagement take place?"

"I never said a word about an engagement. The two things don't naturally follow in the least. You shouldn't jump to conclusions."

"I see. The course of true love not running entirely smooth, eh, Jim?"

Ridgemore nodded. His pipe had gone out. He paused to relight it.

"I wish I could help you, old fellow."

"Probably you can, Harry. I don't understand girls—have never pretended to. If I'd had a sister of my own it might have been different."

Tiverton looked sceptical. He had four sisters of his own, and they did not help him one whit to understand the sex. He kept silent.

"My case is just this, Harry. I love the girl, but don't know in the least her feelings towards myself. The usual advice in such circumstances is to go in and win, but I'm a nervous, backward chap and simply can't move without knowing a bit first how the land lies. It's in that I think you can help me."

"My dear Jim! Why, I don't even know the girl!"

"Yes, you do."

"It's not—er—one of my sisters?"

He advanced the idea with a certain timidity.

"No, don't look so anxious, Harry. I've no designs in that quarter. But you're pretty warm. It is a relative of yours—your cousin, Nellie Mayo."

Tiverton's pipe dropped from his mouth into his lap, then on to the floor. He did not trouble to brush away the ashes which were distributed over his clothes in its fall.

"That little kid!"

Ridgemore looked slightly huffy.

"She's not so very little."

"It seems only yesterday she put up her hair and took to long frocks."

"She's twenty-one next year, Harry, and only half a head shorter than myself."

"I beg pardon, but I've always looked upon her as a youngster. And to think that you're in love with her!"

"Is it so very queer?" Ridgemore's tones were not very conciliatory.

"Forgive me! I did not mean to put you out; it was the surprise. Well, she's a decent girl and pretty, very pretty, some people have said."

The other's face wreathed itself in smiles.

"You're right, Harry. And she's good, isn't she?"

"I believe so. But how can I help you? It's hardly in my line."

Ridgemore pointed to the rows of novels.

"And you've devoured all those. I simply want you when you meet her next to find out how the land lies. You will do the thing tactfully, I know. Introduce my name in conversation and get to know somehow what she thinks of me."

"But what good will that do?"

"It will encourage me to proceed. She has rather a shy manner; I'm shy, too, and can't get behind it. But when I know that she really does care for me, I sha'n't be nervous any longer."

Tiverton looked reflective.

"It's rather a queer thing to ask, Jim. You don't wish me to disclose your feelings towards her?"

"By all means if you think it will help matters."

"But if things miscarry?"

"They won't. You're far too level-headed for that. Well, Harry?"

"Yes, I'll do it."

"Thank you no end! You're the best friend I ever had. I shall owe you everything if all goes right. Let me know, won't you?"

* * * * * *

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"It is good of you, Harry, to bring me here."

"Not at all! I'm glad you are enjoying yourself."

"It doesn't seem to you a waste of a precious Saturday afternoon?"

Tiverton thought of his important mission.

"I could not employ it in any better way, Nellie."

They were seated in Hyde Park on the banks of the Serpentine. Before them the water, smooth as a mirror, gleamed in the sunshine. On its surface several boats were gliding, but the weather was too hot for energetic rowing. The fresh green of the trees showed up against the blue sky, hardly flecked by a cloud. It was a perfect day and Nature was in her most sentimental mood.

Tiverton congratulated himself. He had come to the very spot to open the subject engrossing his mind. He felt himself burning with zeal for the success of his friend's suit. Ridgemore was a fortunate fellow.

"One might be twenty miles from anywhere instead of in the heart of London," Nellie Mayo dreamily observed.

"If you listen very attentively, you will hear the roar of 'buses at the Marble Arch."

"Don't be horrid! This is fairyland. Perhaps you will take me for a row presently, Harry."

"Perhaps—when the sun goes down."

"Ah, you're lazy."

"No. But I want to have a good talk with you first. One can't chat properly when toiling with the sculls."

In her cousin's eyes, Nellie had acquired a new importance. He scanned her features. They were far prettier than he had ever imagined, and in this summer costume—a white dress and a pink sun hat—she looked absolutely bewitching. Perhaps, after all, the fact of Jim being "gone" on her was not the wonder it seemed.

But it was time enough to open proceedings.

"Do you know something, Nellie?"

"What do you mean? Oh, isn't this place a dream?"

Ignoring her second question, Harry replied only to the first.

"Why, Nellie, that you're getting quite pretty."

"Nonsense! I wish you would be sensible."

Yet she could not disguise the pleasure in her eyes.

"But you are. There, I shouldn't be at all surprised if some fellow fell in love with you."

"You are too absurd, Harry."

"I mean it, though—every word of it."

His glance lingered on her head. What pretty ringlets of hair! What a well-shaped ear, like an island in their midst! How delicate and white a neck, and what a rosebud of a mouth! He involuntarily began to hum the tune, "Lucky Jim."

Nellie checked him.

"Hush, Harry! I mean, don't spoil the beautiful quiet." A pause. "I say, you weren't chaffing just now?"

"I'm not given to chaff. You *are* pretty, and I know a fellow who——"

He stopped. Wisdom dictated more cautious progress at this juncture. Too sudden a disclosure of Ridgemore's ardour for her might upset the girl.

"Well, what?" She could not wait for him to proceed.

"Thinks a tremendous lot of you."

"Oh, Harry, who?"

But he only laughed.

Nellie was growing visibly excited. There was a fine colour in her cheeks, and her eyes glistened. Tiverton felt more and more interested in her. A surfeit of sentimental novels had worked its way into his youthful blood. He began to draw upon his recollections of various episodes in them.

"Ah, Nellie, when love seizes a fellow, it lifts him up to the skies."

"I know the feeling a little bit."

"You do? Then I needn't explain."

"Oh, please do! I like it!"

"Well, you feel warm all over and most awfully jolly. And you vow to be such a decent fellow—to be worthy of her, you see."

Nellie's lip was trembling, and the colour in her cheeks matched the shade of her hat. Tiverton drew further and further upon his imagination.

"You sleep with her photograph under your pillow, and kiss it half a dozen times directly you wake up in the morning."

"I haven't had mine taken—er—since I was quite young."

"Then you must at once, Nellie. You don't know how someone would appreciate it."

Suddenly Harry felt a small gloved hand gently pressing his own. It was evidently Nellie's way of showing her appreciation of his gratifying remarks. Ridgemore's success was assured now; she was a girl with a heart.

"Oh, Harry, why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I? How could I?"

"I don't know. But it would have been nice to have known before."

A man came up and demanded twopence for their seats.

Tiverton paid the money and was glad to see his back, Nellie played with the handle of her parasol. She was evidently brooding deeply over something.

"Harry!"

"Yes, Nellie!"

"I wonder if you saw *Scrappy Bits* last week."

"It doesn't often come my way. What was in it?"

"It was so silly. I didn't agree with it in the least."

"What did it say?"

"That first cousins shouldn't marry."

"Gracious goodness! Nellie! You don't suppose—why——" He stopped, speechless.

"No, Harry, it's all right. As I said, I don't believe it a bit. You know I've loved you for years, don't you, dear?"

He stammered something which she construed into assent.

* * * * *

When Ridgemore came down to breakfast on Monday morning, a bulky letter from Tiverton lay on the table. For a minute or so he fingered the envelope. What had caused Tiverton to write so lengthy a communication? He nervously broke the seal.

There was a long preamble, apologetic in vein. Why could not Tiverton, with such hazards at stake, come more quickly to the point? He read impatiently on.

An uneasy suspicion took root in his mind.

"I implore your forgiveness, Jim, for what I am going to tell you," the letter read. "You know the interview with Nellie was not of my own seeking; I sought it out solely on your account. All, as I imagined, was proceeding so nicely for you, when there was a stunning revelation. Prepare yourself for a shock, old man! Nellie told me that she loved *me* and had done so for a long time. We are now engaged to be married."

Incredulity—dismay—anger flitted across Ridgemore's face in rapid succession.

He tore the letter to bits and threw it into the grate.

As he brushed his silk hat for the City, he said to the cat:

"There, if you want a thing done properly, you always have to do it yourself."

The cat blinked.

And that is why Harry Tiverton and James Ridgemore, once bosom friends, never now speak to one another.

Herbert Jamieson.

MISS PASSEE: "I should like to see a young man try to kiss me." Miss Young: "You cruel thing!"

SHE: "Shall I sing 'Then You'll Remember Me'?" He: "Yes; but, Ethel, don't forget that I want to remember you as kindly as possible."

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A Girl's Boast.

How Joan Mortlock Tried to Carry it out and what Came of the Attempt.

"SHE ought to have been a boy!"

Richard Mortlock thought of the words of the head-mistress of the Mount School for Girls as he watched his nineteen-year-old daughter romping about the lawn with her great dog. The very picture of health, youth, and exuberance of animal spirits! Dark hair, sparkling eyes, cheeks with a touch of carmine, well-rounded figure scarcely above the medium height, and full of natural grace and suppleness. Richard Mortlock thought of the bygone days when his wife and Joan's mother had appeared to him as the central figure of a picture that had much similarity with that upon which he was gazing, and his eyes grew moist.

"No! It's wrong!" he murmured. "Miss Jevons doesn't understand. Joan has as much roguishness in her composition as most boys, and she dearly loves a little fun, but to say that she ought to have been a boy is wrong! To turn such a charming piece of humanity into a member of the opposite sex would be a mistake! Although I say it as shouldn't, as the village people remark, Joan will perform a greater and better duty as she is, by bestowing her wealth of affection and energy upon some worthy man, and urging him on to greater things than he would be able to accomplish without a wife, or with one who has less mischief in her composition than Joan!"

He smiled, and the moisture that had crept into his eyes was gone. His smile deepened as he saw her racing the dog to the end of the lawn and away to the spot where a small river flowed past the grounds of Mortlock House. Then he saw her gather her skirts together and he uttered an exclamation of anxiety. He made a step forward as if to pass out of the window in pursuit, but stopped immediately. The girl and the dog had made a leap and had alighted on the opposite bank, where Joan faced about and waved her hand airily towards her father.

Mortlock answered the greeting, then turned back into the room and seated himself in a really easy-chair. That trifling escapade had caused a change in the train of his thoughts.

Joan's animal spirits might cause her to run the risk of bodily harm. Might it not also happen that her mischief-loving propensities, in conjunction with her unsophisticated ideas, would lead her into other dangers—dangers of the heart or soul?

"I should not have the slightest misgiving if she were—if she saw things as clearly as some girls do, but she is somewhat too trustful!" mused Mortlock. "I ought to have a feminine relative here with her, but I don't care to damp Joan's spirits by tying her to the society of someone much older than herself!" He sat staring at the carpet for several minutes, then he shook himself and arose with a laugh. "I am foolish! Joan has enough wit to take care of herself and not permit her boisterous energy to lead her into any madcap act!"

The object of Richard Mortlock's solicitude certainly seemed able to take care of herself, but how far this confidence was justified will be seen in the sequel.

On the following day there was to be a gathering in the Abbey ruins, a kind of garden party, where the Rector would have tea served and the young people would enjoy themselves. Joan was looking forward to this afternoon's pleasure; it was something to do, and there would be an opportunity to see the Rector's guest, of whom she had heard much from her friend, Edith Graham. That young lady, some two summers older than Joan, called at Mortlock House in the morning to ascertain if Joan were *sure* to be there, and it was that call which caused the trouble to commence.

"Of course I am sure to be there!" declared Joan emphatically. "It will be grand. I am dying to see this handsome stranger, naturally! What is he like?"

"Handsome! That sums it all up!" replied Edith with a laugh. "He has just one defect; he is coldly polite to ladies, and rumour has it that he is invulnerable to the charms of feminity!"

"Is he?" cried Joan, laughing in her turn. "Well, he must not think that he is so superior a being and that the members of our sex are so inferior!"

"Oh, he isn't at all like *that*! But he appears to be one of those men who—who are not easily captivated!"

"Wouldn't it be fun to see him a captive to the charms of one of us!" cried Joan, clapping her hands. "I wish——"

"One of *us!*" echoed Edith. "Why, you haven't long left school."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of myself!" said Joan truthfully. "I was thinking of the others. And yet," she continued in a tone of mingled vexation and jest, the former sentiment having been caused by Edith's rather sarcastic observation, "why shouldn't even poor little I be capable of doing it? I should like to do it just for the fun of the thing! It would be grand to make this invulnerable man surrender at discretion! I have a good mind to try!"

"You might as well spare yourself the trouble; you will not succeed!" said Edith Graham coldly.

Joan's eyes flashed; those words were really a challenge, and they aroused all her spirit. The idea was one calculated to afford scope for her mischief-loving propensities, which was another inducement to carry it out. Without fully estimating the significance of her words, Joan burst forth with:

"I'll do it! I'll bring him to the proposing point, or I'll forfeit my next Christmas box from papa in favour of the county hospital!"

Edith Graham laughed a trifle hysterically because, as she gazed at the flushed face and small figure, she could not prevent herself from inwardly acknowledging that Joan stood as good a chance as anyone of accomplishing such a task. They separated with a friendliness which, it must be confessed, was not quite genuine, and Joan set her lips firmly together, shut out all misgivings, and prepared to carry out her boast! Yes; it was a boast and she was wrong to have made it, but she would go through with it!

The afternoon was an ideal one for such an occasion. The sun shone on the hills and dales of the ground which had once been the domain of saintly men and, prior to that, a castle fortress. Wild flowers grew at the foot of the ruins of ancient walls, ivy-covered some of them, forming themselves into shady nooks, the grass of the flat land was velvety, and here and there divided by a parterre of cultivated flowers. Seats were fixed about the ruins for those who desired to rest without sitting on Mother Earth.

Joan was full of gaiety; her lithe form moved swiftly about the grounds and attracted general attention. Joan had been briefly introduced to the Rector's guest, who had bowed in the

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most polished manner, but had otherwise not been much interested in her, to judge by appearances.

Mr. Frank Spencer had disappeared; he seemed to be one by himself and was probably enjoying a pipe in some quiet nook. "From which I shall promptly haul him!" murmured Joan with determination; "a man mustn't think that he can escape the civilities of society in that way!"

Quite suddenly, in turning a corner, she came upon him; in fact, she nearly tripped over his foot as he sat with his back against an ivy-covered wall and his legs stretched at full-length. She hastily apologised, and he, not in the least disconcerted, lazily informed her that she "needn't mention it!"

"I have mentioned it!" said Joan. "I always think that it is rather absurd to tell people not to mention this or that when they have done it!"

"I shouldn't think so deeply if I were you! It's hard work and causes wrinkles!" he returned imperturbably.

She looked at him searchingly, but he gave no trace of his feelings, and she could not make up her mind whether he was quietly chaffing her or not.

"Thinking again?" he inquired, as she did not speak, and Joan was piqued to find that her eyebrows had contracted in meditation.

"I was thinking that you would make a good picture of——" She stopped herself abruptly, before the acid little speech was finished.

"Laziness!" He finished it for her nonchalantly. "You were going to say that, weren't you?"

"I intended to say 'indolence.' It's more polite!" she returned, with a mischievous twinkle in the expressive eyes which he did not fail to notice.

"It is very comfortable here!" he said, with an attempt to excuse himself. "I cannot ask you to sit down, as there is no seat. Pity, isn't it? I am sure we could pass a few minutes very agreeably in conversation; we understand each other tolerably well, do we not?"

Joan opened her lips to reply, checked herself, and then decided to say it, which she did with an air of defiance.

"Most gentlemen, less indolent, would have made another suggestion; but I can understand that it would require too much energy on your part!"

"By Jove! That's an arrow-pointed little speech, Miss Mortlock, but I'll own that I deserve it!" He sprang to his feet. "May I walk with you for a minute or two through these lovely grounds? I will not bore you long with my presence!"

Joan felt her face grow crimson. He would think her very forward! She must check her capacity for making a quick retort!

"I can't refuse, since I have really asked for it!" thought Joan, feeling uncomfortably warm.

So they strolled about the grounds for nearly half-an-hour together, till they came upon the Rector and a small party who engaged them in talk, and Joan contrived to slip away.

The half-hour with Mr. Frank Spencer had been a very agreeable one; she had forgotten her discomfort and they had chatted and bantered one another in true friendly fashion. He had received a brilliant education and she was by no means a vapid schoolgirl.

They met every day for the next week, either at some social gathering or while out on an errand or taking a constitutional along the country road. Somehow, Joan felt that she looked forward to these meetings, and she was disappointed on the one occasion when they did not have a minute or two in private conversation. She wanted to tell herself that she was pursuing her plan, but this was not exactly tasteful to her; and when she tried to examine her sentiments and find an explanation for this desire to see Frank Spencer, the answer that came to her mind caused her to blush at her own reflection in the mirror, and to call it "an absurd idea!" So she continued to look for the time when she would meet him, and to refuse to understand why she did so!

He met her one day about a mile from home and they walked together in the direction of Mortlock House and the Rectory. When those two commenced a quiet chat it was like knocking flint against steel, for sparks would fly very quickly. Spencer took a delight in exciting sharp retorts from this impulsive girl, and she tried to galvanise him into life, as she said.

"Don't you think I have idled my time away quite sufficiently here, Miss Mortlock?" he asked quizzically. "I ought to be devoting myself to some more useful occupation, eh?"

But Joan did not reply. Her power of speech seemed to have deserted her for the moment. Her face was averted, or he would have seen that it went pale, and afterwards became more red than before. Going away? She thought she heard him say that he was going away to-morrow! And what about her boast? No, it wasn't that which disturbed her. It was—nothing, nothing, nothing! How silly she was!

"I shall be sorry to go," he was saying. "It has been very pleasant here, but I must return. It isn't fair to leave a sweetheart so long. I am afraid I haven't treated her fairly, as I promised to be back about a week sooner. I wonder if she is capable of jealousy? Hardly, I think! I feel sure that she would like to see you, Miss Mortlock. I have to——"

"That is father's trap," interrupted Joan in a shrill voice, that was not at all like hers. "I can ride home now, thank you!"

Richard Mortlock came up at a trot and exchanged cordial greetings with the young man.

"I can give you a lift if you are going straight back," he said. "I think we can squeeze three persons on this seat!"

Frank Spencer looked at Joan and waited for her to second the invitation; it struck him that he would not object to the squeezing if she would only glance at him with that roguish flash of the eyes! But there was no answer to his gaze.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Mortlock, but I prefer to walk this morning!" he said politely, but he could not altogether repress the ring of disappointment which struck Joan's ears very strangely.

Joan, much to her father's surprise, complained of a wretched headache and did not come down from her bedroom after lunch. On the following morning she did not look at all well, and Mortlock was much concerned, but Joan would not let him send for the doctor. "I shall be all right again by to-morrow, papa!" she told him. Mortlock wondered and wondered at the cause, and his heart grew a trifle heavy with the suspicion that it was a love trouble.

It is questionable whether any girl ever felt more wretched than Joan. She had faced her trouble squarely and she had realised the truth.

She had deliberately set out to bring this man to her feet with no more praiseworthy object than that of carrying out a boast born of her own love of fun and the vague challenge of an envious girl. She had been caught in her own trap, for—she loved Frank Spencer! Why should she conceal it from herself any longer? She had grown to love him with an ardour that almost startled her now that she recognised it. And he? He had fought her with her own weapons. He had made her love him, and he must know it, and yet he had a sweetheart at home!

She would lose her £10 note, and be laughed at into the bargain, but what was that compared with the loss of Frank? How dreary life would be in the coming days without him! She shivered as if the cold grip of winter were upon her, but the next moment it seemed as if the air of the room would stifle her, and she went out into the spacious grounds.

The Joan who walked wearily through the garden and into the shrubbery beyond was a different being from the merry, emancipated school-girl who had tripped so lightly along those very paths three weeks or so previously. This Joan was more of a woman, with a woman's emotions and knowledge of some of the bitterness of life. Love had caused the transformation, and the disappointment of a love wrongly given had occasioned the fuller knowledge of the fact that

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life is a serious journey along the unknown. And Joan began dimly to realise that the joys of life are made greater by contrast with its sorrows.

She reached a small opening, a circular space of about a dozen feet in diameter, on one side of which a seat had been placed by her father. It was so quiet there, and Mr. Mortlock liked to retire to this spot occasionally and smoke his pipe. Joan threw herself on the wooden form and leant against the hedge at the back; she closed her eyes and tried to imagine what life would be without Frank. In utter weariness she must have fallen asleep, for she was awakened by a touch. She opened her eyes and saw Frank Spencer trying to balance her hat neatly on her head without rousing her.

"Now, you should not have moved!" he observed reproachfully. "It fell off and you were exposed to the sun; so I was trying to put it on without disturbing you. You have spoilt the picture by jumping up in that fashion!"

He was looking at her with such evident admiration that the girl's face grew red at his heartlessness.

"How dare you come here?" she asked, trying hard to repress the tears of vexation. "You have no business here!"

"Oh, haven't I?" he said imperturbably. "I think I have. I've come on very serious business! I should like to know why you treated me so shabbily yesterday, when your father came up!"

"I treated you no worse than you deserved!" she retorted.

"Two blacks don't make a white," he returned, not in the least disturbed. "If I had treated you shabbily, which is not the case, it didn't right matters when you followed a bad example, or thought you were following it. Now I want to know why!"

"I shall not tell you!" she cried fiercely.

"You must!" he said, approaching her.

"I shall not!" cried Joan again. She tried to get away from him, but the seat was in the way; and, somehow, she did not care to remind him of what he had said. "Please leave me!"

"Not till you have told me that you love me as madly as I love you, Joan!" he said, all his assumed coolness gone.

She felt his arms grasping her; she struggled against his embrace, but she was helpless, and in a second he held her captive, his eyes gazing into hers, his lips close to hers.

"May I take a kiss to seal the compact?" he asked passionately.

She bent her head still further back, and, in desperation, gasped: "Wait till you see your sweetheart at home!"

He relaxed his grasp in sheer surprise, and she released herself, standing erect before him, defiant though in tears, and panting for breath. She was a perfect picture, and his amazement and annoyance melted away under the spell which her appearance cast over him.

"There is some blunder!" he said gravely. "It is very stupid of me to call her my sweetheart, but I never thought that it would lead to such a scene as this. Joan, surely you didn't think me such a rascal as to make love to two women at once?"

Joan grew more confused than ever, but Frank came to her relief.

"It was all my fault, Joan, of course. Sit down here with me, and I will explain. My widowed mother has been wanting me to marry for the last three years, but I have never felt the slightest inclination to fall in love with anyone. But the dear mother insisted every little while that she would like to see me settled with a good wife. I always laughed it off, and one day I told her, just to tease her, that I should always regard her as my sweetheart and should never want another. And I have kept up the fun ever since, calling her sweetheart so commonly that I say it unconsciously, much to the amusement of my friends.

She felt his arms grasping her. She struggled against his embrace, but she was helpless.

"So, Joan, you see that my sweetheart at home is my mother! And I can assure you, dear," he added tenderly, "that she will be most happy to resign the title and position in your favour."

He placed his arms round her once more, and Joan, all blushes and repentance, was yielding to his embrace, when a horrid thought crossed her mind.

"Oh, I cannot!" she moaned, burying her face in her hands. "What will they say? They will think me a designing creature and call me horrid names, and tell anybody that I didn't love you one scrap, and that I married you to carry out a boast, and——"

"Dear me! What dreadfully bad grammar you are using, to say 'and' so often," he interposed in a droll tone. "Better tell me all about it, because I am not going to lose you if I can help it."

Thereupon Joan unburdened herself, with half-averted face, and told him what had passed between Edith Graham and the mischief-loving girl that Joan Mortlock used to be.

"Oh, is that all?" he inquired, with a smile. "Well, we won't worry about that! I think we had better say that the result of the battle was a compromise, and that we will make the donation to the hospital jointly. It seems to me that such a proceeding will disarm all who might desire to say unkind things. So we will call it settled, and now, as we have cleared away all obstacles, I'm going to have that kiss!"

And he had it, followed by others, so that there should be no mistake about the binding character of the compact!

Geo. Day.

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AN INTERRUPTION.

Telling Why a Girl Altered Her Mind.

THE many exciting and merry features of the long day that had just passed had tired the passengers of the s.s *Imperial*, and one by one they left the saloon to seek their bunks, to dream of the Old Country, whose shores they would be able to discern when they rose in the morning. In a short time the saloon was empty but for two.

A young woman, as fair a specimen of her sex as the most exacting critic could wish for, who was seated at the piano, situated at one end of the cosily-lounged, white-and-gold decorated room, playing a soft melody, and a man tanned with two years' wear of war, and exposure to a strong African sun, who was leaning over her, watching the deft fingers manipulating the keys.

The last few notes of the air sounded on the piano, and the player leant back on her stool, and looked up at the man with a smile. He did not say a word, but with a strange, tense look flashing across his face, suddenly bent his head, and kissed the red lips so near his own. For one moment of awful tension Alison Cartwright gazed at him with an expression of horrified amazement, and with a look in her eyes as if something had just been revealed to her that cut her heart in two.

Then of a sudden she leapt to her feet, and stood facing him with a countenance like marble, so still and stony was it.

"How did you dare, Mr. Carstairs?" she gasped with an effort. "You coward!"

The man's face went ashen, and he opened his mouth as if to speak, but a look in the girl's eyes kept the words from coming. His head slowly dropped to his breast, as if he acknowledged the truth of the epithet that no one of his own sex could have rightly bestowed upon him.

There was another dead silence for an instant, then the woman turned on her heel, and ascended the broad staircase leading to the berths, with not so much as a glance behind at her companion, who had thrown himself into a lounge, with hands covering his face.

He remained in this attitude of dejection, while the marble clock on the mantelpiece ticked away half-an-hour, when there came a loud shout of horror from above, followed by a crash that shook the liner from end to end. Rushing on deck Carstairs saw the great outline of another vessel just disappearing into the darkness.

A loud sucking noise below, and the smashed bulwarks on the *Imperial's* port side told a silent tale of what had happened. In the darkness some other vessel had collided with her, to what extent he knew not.

The truth was soon out, for with a calmness that did much to soothe the terrified passengers, the Captain gave orders for the boats to be manned. Quickly they were released from their thwarts and lowered to the water level, and the passengers took their seats.

Dick Carstairs was about to get into one of the boats, when a thought entered his mind that seemed to run through his veins like molten lead. "Where was Alison Cartwright?" She had not entered the boats; he could swear to that. She must still be below!

Caring nothing for the risk he was running, he rushed along the deck, and down the stairs. At the bottom he stumbled over some prostrate form, which was lying full length at his feet. It was the girl, and to all appearances she had fainted.

Gathering her up in his strong arms Carstairs tore up the stairs again, and along the deck, but except for that terrible sucking noise there was no sound, and Carstairs' heart almost stopped beating as he realised that they were alone on a sinking ship.

For a moment the terrible fact robbed him of his senses, but the noise beneath the deck was becoming more threatening every minute, and some quick action was imperative. The words of one of the A.B.'s that had been addressed to him only that morning occurred to him at this juncture. "Yes, sir," the man had said, "them there seats 'ull float like a cork, but they 'll only 'old one of your size."

He had been speaking of the seats on deck which were built on the pontoon principle, and would act as a life-saver in a case of extreme emergency.

There was one thing to do, and Carstairs did it. Laying the senseless form of the girl upon one of the seats, he lowered it gently into the water, then plunged in beside it. Guiding it with his two hands, he kicked out strongly with his feet, and gradually pushed the miniature raft away from the doomed vessel. They had drifted fifty yards when a deafening hissing report came from behind, and a violent commotion of the waves announced the fact that the s.s. *Imperial* was no more.

"Poor old girl," murmured the swimmer. "Her death was a sudden one, but it looks as if two of her passengers were going to make up for it in the matter of time."

This view of the matter was grim, but only too near the truth, for the wind had risen suddenly, and the waves were beginning to get more choppy and more boisterous with every rise and fall, and though Carstairs tried hard to steady "the raft," as he inwardly termed the floating seat, the waters were too strong for him, and it began to rock in an alarming manner.

The see-saw motion and the occasional lapping of spray over her face restored consciousness to the feminine passenger; a low shuddering sigh shook her form, and Carstairs heard her whisper freely: "Oh! how could he? And I thought him such a gentleman,"

Though his tan deepened somewhat, Dick took no heed of the reproach, but placed his wet hand on her forehead. The cold touch roused her thoroughly, and she turned her head towards him, and opened her eyes.

"Mr. Carstairs! Oh, where are we?" she asked fearfully.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Cartwright," he said, in as soothing a tone as possible. "The *Imperial* collided with another boat and sank in ten minutes."

"But the other passengers?" she asked quickly. "My uncle and aunt. Where are they? For pity's sake do not say that they are drowned."

"Don't distress yourself, Miss Cartwright, they are not dead," Dick answered cheerfully. "All the rest of the ship got away safely in the boats, but I——"

He paused, puzzled for the minute to describe the incident correctly, and over the girl's face flashed a quick look of understanding."

"*You came back for me*," she whispered, in a hushed tone.

Carstairs saw a glistening drop in each of her eyes, and the sight paralysed his tongue, so he said nothing.

The moon was rising now, and in her pale light, Dick looked about him. But on every hand there was sea, sea, nothing but sea, and a lump came into his throat at the sight. Not for his own safety, he had risked that many a time in the land he had been coming from—was not his name embellished with those coveted symbols, V.C.?—but for the safety of the girl on the feeble raft, that was floating beside him.

He said a few gentle words of hope to her, and besought her

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to get some sleep, but she refused even to try, and wanted to insist upon him having a rest on the fragile seat, while she swam beside it for a distance, a suggestion which he laughed at.

Slowly the long night wore on, while the waves grew higher every minute, and Dick found it more difficult to keep his frozen fingers on the arm of the seat as time went on. Now and again the misery of this endless bath in the cold ocean prompted the thought within him to let go and sink quietly into the waves and end it all, but the woman seemed to divine his intention. Whenever it rose in his mind a look from her beautiful eyes would banish the thought. One of these looks seemed to Carstairs to hold more than a reproach, and his eyes brightened as he swam nearer to her side.

"Miss Cartwright," he said quietly, and though he tried hard, his voice would shake slightly. "Have you forgiven me for the insult I offered you last night?"

The answer came softly to his ear above the hiss of the waves.

"Yes, Mr. Carstairs, freely."

"It was a coward's trick," he said hoarsely, "but something made me do it—Miss Cartwright—Alison—if—I—we live through this, will you be——"

In his excitement he had loosened his grip somewhat, and with a roaring gurgle a giant wave seized him. He struggled hard to free himself from its grasp, but the long hours that he had been submerged, and the power of the wave, crushed the remains of his strength, and the last glimpse the girl on the raft had of him showed his face white and despairing under the moonlight, yet with a look of great hope in his eyes.

* * * * *

"Good Heavens! Surely it can't be! By Jove, it is though! Carstairs, old man, where the dickens have you sprung from? Why, do you know that all England has been mourning you as dead? Poor old chap, how bad you look!"

Dick Carstairs, with no tan on his face now, but with an alabaster colour in its place, smiled feebly at the speaker's remarks, especially as they had been uttered in a tone that the whole thoroughfare could hear distinctly.

"I don't expect that I look the picture of health now, Deering," he answered, as brightly as his feelings would allow. "You see, I've been ill for the last six months."

John Deering looked sympathetic, and his jolly face grew longer than it had been for many a month. Suddenly it relapsed again to its usual joviality, and he gave Carstairs a thump on the back that reminded that individual of the collision on the *Imperial*.

"I know just the thing to pick you up again, old man!" he roared excitedly. "Come down to 'The Denes' with me. You know the mater will be delighted to see you, and our Bedfordshire air will brace you up again in a twinkle. Now don't say 'No.'"

Deering spoke the last sentence in a most piteous tone, and Carstairs felt he could but do as his friend asked, moreover, he had experienced some of the hospitality of the Deerings before, and he knew none to excel it.

A couple of hours later and he was chatting to a beautiful, silver-haired old lady in the drawing-room of her home. Deering's mother had greeted him in so excited a manner as to puzzle Carstairs. To his mind it seemed as though she had some mysterious delight in knowing that he was not dead.

She would not allow him to be carried off to dress, but banished her son alone to the dressing-room with the plea that she had something for her guest's private ear. When the door had closed the old lady seized Dick by the arm, and leading him to the conservatory, thrust him inside with a chuckle of glee.

Carstairs, with a feeling of bewilderment, looked around him, and the sight of a figure in a basket-chair beneath a huge palm set his pulses throbbing heavily. At the sound of the door closing the figure looked up, then sprang to her feet with a gasp.

"Mr. Carstairs—is—it—you?"

The conservatory was dark, and Dick could only see the outline of a slim figure dressed entirely in black, but he knew the voice. He had last heard it half a year ago, when he and its owner had been together on the bosom of the waves of Biscay.

"Miss Cartwright! Oh, thank Heaven for its mercies!" he said fervently.

Then, striding across the floor towards her, he looked into her face as if to satisfy himself that he was making no mistake. The girl returned his gaze, her eyes were shining with a deep thankfulness.

"I never thought to see you again, Mr. Carstairs," she said softly. "Will you tell me how you escaped?"

He bade her sit down again in her chair, and drew up another beside it.

"It is not a very long story," he answered, "but how I am alive now is beyond explanation. That brute of a wave seemed to knock all the strength out of me, and all my efforts to get back to you were unavailing. Yet somehow or other I managed to keep afloat as long as I can remember. But I must have lost consciousness, for I woke again to find myself in a pretty little bed in a house on the French coast, as I learnt afterwards. I had just time to see two people beside the bed and to hear a joyful exclamation in French, when darkness came again.

"I was ill for weeks, good old Madame Pautier and her husband told me later, and when I recovered my memory had gone. These good people kept me there for six months, until everything came back to me suddenly two days ago. They said that I had been found insensible on the beach, but of you they had seen or heard nothing.

"I thanked the good peasants for their great kindness, and got back to England as fast as boat and train could bring me, and John was the first friend that I met. That is all the story, but it is a miracle that I am still alive. Can I hear yours, for since I recovered my memory, I have been half mad to know whether you were alive or dead."

The girl nodded consent.

"When you disappeared," she said gently. "I felt inclined to drop into the sea and stop there, but the hope that you would still live kept me on that dear raft until daylight came, and a homeward bound liner sighted me and picked me up. When it reached port I made inquiries everywhere about you, for I owe you my life, but no one came forward with anything to tell, and after a time I had to think that you were d—dead."

A quiver seemed to run through her frame, and insensibly she touched her black dress. Carstairs felt his heart leap within him, and he bent forward and took one of her hands.

"And you wore black because you thought I was dead?" he asked hoarsely.

She did not answer him, and Dick rose from his chair and knelt beside her.

"Do you know what question I was going to ask you, Alison, when that wave separated us?" he asked in a whisper.

A swift flush crossed the girl's face, and she lowered her eyes before the expression in his.

"I—I think so," she murmured weakly.

"And if I were to ask you that question again, darling, would you give me the answer I long for?"

Her lips scarcely moved, yet a word came to Carstair's ears that for all its weakness of sound, meant more to him than aught else in the world. It was "Yes."

Arthur Edwards.

To Story Writers.

We shall be pleased to consider complete novelettes of about 20,000 words in length, and to pay cash down for those accepted. Manuscripts must be type-written (or very legibly hand-written), and should be sent to The Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Postage for return of MSS., if unsuitable, should be inclosed.

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UNSOLVED LOVE PROBLEMS.

No. I.

THE AWKWARD PREDICAMENT OF EDWARD CLEMENTS.

(A Prize of One Guinea is Offered for the Best Way Out of the Difficulty. See "Your Editor Chats.")

It was a prematurely warm day in February, and pretty Kitty Treloar, full of the insolence of youth that takes life, sunshine and flowers as its right, came along a field-path leading away from the newly "exploited" suburb of South Dealing.

She could hardly keep her feet from dancing, and her voice from singing, so full of joy did the spring fill her.

"Come on Rover, now for a race."

And away they flew, the one as joyous as the other. But with a sudden recollection she stopped and, straightening her hat, said:

"I hope that ridiculous Ted Clements is not waiting at the next stile."

Sure enough at the next stile, there was a young man, to no outward appearance ridiculous except in so far as he was young enough to blush immoderately at the advent of a charming, mischievious girl.

"Why, Mr. Clements! How you startled me! It is curious I should meet you on this lonely walk."

Ted would have liked to reply that since he knew it to be her favourite walk, he had met her there, on an average, three times a week, but he had not the courage, so only stammered something about its being "the only real country walk about there."

"Do you love the country also?" she said. "It is very beautiful to-day, and I, and the birds, and Rover, are all enjoying it. Hark!" she continued, well content to make the conversation and let him admire her—"hear how they sing, and see how the primroses are all coming out, for all the world as if we should not be hiding our blue noses in furs next week, and seeing everything black and shrivelled with the frost."

Her laughing face confuted the pessimism of her words, and Ted, casting about in his mind for suitable words with which to introduce the avowal that had been trembling on his lips for weeks, began (how many proposals have been ushered in by these lines?):

"*In the Spring a brighter iris gleams upon the burnished dove,*
In the Spring——"

But Kitty interrupted:

"Just so."

"*In the Spring a young man's fancy, lightly turns to thoughts of love.*"

"The secret of happiness is, take everything lightly, whether 'tis measles or love."

Ted's sentimentalism vanished, as she meant it should, but a righteous wrath arose in him at her sacrilegious words.

"Miss Treloar, are you never serious? Do you not believe a man's destiny is to love, to find the only true happiness in giving his whole heart unreservedly and for ever to some beautiful and noble woman?"

For all answer she sang mockingly:

"*Oh, love for a year, a week, or a day,*
But alas for the love that loves alway.

"At least it would be 'alas,' if anybody ever did it, except in poetry and novels. It doesn't work in with present-day life."

Ted was boyish enough to feel exceedingly annoyed at her teasing words, which he took as a personal insult, feeling sure that "he loved as never man loved before," and so, being annoyed, he forgot to be shy and spoke out like a man.

"Miss Treloar, *I* love *you*, with all my heart; and as I love you now, so I shall to the end of my life."

Somewhat abashed at his earnestness, Kitty stammered a little, though she replied saucily:

"That's a bit rash—you have not got to the end of your life yet."

"Oh, you may mock at me if you please," he cried, reckless in his wrath, "you don't know the strength and unchangeableness of a man's love, but I think you might give a man of my age credit for knowing his own mind."

Ted was young, but Kitty was younger, and she could not help admiring him in this mood more than in his former bashful stammering attitude toward her, so nineteen murmured softly to twenty-one:

"I did not mean to hurt your feelings—I—I beg your pardon."

Her unwonted humility brought him tumbling down off his high horse, he turned suddenly and seized her hands, saying in a trembling voice:

"Kitty, Kitty, do not beg *my* pardon, it is I who beg your pardon, and your love. You are the most beautiful and charming girl in the world, and I do love you so much. Can you not love me a little bit? Oh, Kitty, darling, say yes," and in his eagerness he tried to draw her to him.

For a moment it seemed as though she might yield, but she recovered herself and said:

"I can't say yes, because I—I don't love you."

"But you will?" he interposed eagerly.

"No, I sha'n't," she replied, shaking her head obstinately.

"You might wait a bit and try," he urged, hope dying out of his eyes. "Lots of girls don't love fellows at first."

Kitty, now quite mistress of herself and keeping him at arm's length, had quickly made up her mind.

"I don't think I should," she said dispassionately, "and I am not going to try. I don't want to love anybody yet, I want to enjoy myself a bit longer."

An older man who knew the world would have seen an unconscious pathos in these words, Ted (with whom she had flirted for some months) saw only selfishness.

"Enjoy yourself!" he cried, and then lashing himself into a fury, as she smiled and nodded, he went on, "Yes, go on enjoying yourself, go on leading more foolish men to love you, and then laugh in their faces; go on exacting admiration and attention from all and giving nothing in return; go on enjoying yourself, and let *me* go hang!" and he turned quickly and walked off in the opposite direction.

The words were bitter, but he had some cause to feel bitter as even Kitty herself acknowledged as she gazed after him with tears in her pretty eyes.

"Poor fellow, he was very rude, but he seems to feel it more than I thought he would."

A week later she heard he had gone to join a brother on a banana plantation in Jamaica, and the feeling grew gradually upon her that life was very blank now that he was gone.

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and she wished he had been in less of a hurry to put the ocean between them.

A year passed, eighteen months passed, and Ted Clements taller, broader, and manlier, but thinner, and more tanned, was seated in his brother's cool verandah, smoking and reading home letters.

One, from his sister, contained the following words:

"By-the-bye, your old love, Kitty Treloar, has been quite ill. She has had at last to go away to some foreign cure place, but has come back looking rather worse than better. Mrs. Treloar, who is completely wrapped up in her, seems very upset about it."

He let fall the paper.

"Kitty ill! It does not seem possible. That bright, merry little girl!"

All his resentment against her had died out with his love, and that was no more than a tender recollection at the end of a year. For some months he had thought life held nothing more for him, that his heart was broken, and that all women were frivolous, light-minded creatures, not worth an honest man's love. But change of life and scene and plenty of work worked wonders. First he found comfort in work, then beauty in the world, then joy in living, and lastly a certain Miss Elsie Braithwaite had caused him to doubt the truth of his heresies about women.

Now, therefore, he thought condescendingly:

"Poor little Kitty! Well, I was very angry with her once, but I am not sure now that she did not do me a good turn after all. She was quite right, she was too young, and so was I. Ridiculous! What do nineteen and twenty-one know about life? Now, it is different with twenty-two and nearly twenty-three. Those are ages when one is really competent to choose one's life partner," and he went off into a not unpleasant reverie.

At last he roused himself.

"Hullo, here's a strange handwriting, but with the old postmark, South Dealing. Who can it be from?"

He opened the letter and glanced at the signature, "S. M. Treloar—Kitty's mother, by all that's wonderful! What can she be writing to me about, and he read as follows:

"DEAR MR. CLEMENTS,—*I fear I am going to do something very unusual, but I feel I can dare anything for my daughter's happiness—it may be her life. Still, before I go any further I must beg you to believe that I am writing this letter quite unknown to her. To continue, I hope you will excuse my saying that I am aware that my daughter refused you last year, and I must add that I did not think she treated you well in the matter, as we had all thought she intended to accept you, and no doubt you thought so also. Surely one can forgive such a mere child for not knowing her own mind. Ever since you went away so suddenly, she has drooped and pined—nothing does her any good. The doctor says she has something on her mind, and unless we can remove the trouble he is afraid the consequences may be most serious. I think I am justified in saying she would give you a very different answer now, if you were to ask her again. Oh! Mr. Clements, to one of your constant nature, I feel I need not apologise for writing what will bring about your happiness as well as hers.*

"*If it is impossible for you to come over at once, perhaps you would write to her, or to her distracted mother,*

"S. M. TRELOAR."

"Here's a go," said Ted, staring moodily out into the brilliant sunshine beyond. "Ask her again—but I have no desire to—and then there is Elsie Braithwaite. Hang it all, I can't. My constant nature—and it's not more than a year ago. The old lady seems so sure I shall still feel the same and no doubt Kitty does too. When I remember what I said to her I feel an awful cad to have changed so soon. 'Pon my word I'm in a beastly hole which ever way I look at it. If I say I still love her and want to marry her, I shall be telling a lie, and if I refuse to do so, I shall be acting like a cad. Good Heavens! What is a fellow to do?"

L. Hughes.

Your Editor Chats.

"THE PURSUIT OF SARA" is causing a great deal of excitement. The very novelty of the revelations has appealed to thousands of people, and especially is this the case in those towns directly connected with her flight. All will admit, too, that Miss Gillespie is gifted with the power of describing her experiences graphically, and this is, of course, another important factor in the great popularity of the series.

She herself is highly delighted that her narrations are so entertaining, but when she called to see me in my sanctum the other day, she mildly rebuked me on the ground that I had flattered her in this column by calling her a heroine. Such is modesty!

THIS is just a reminder to readers in Leicester and district, in which locality the episode told in this number takes place, that a splendid Gramophone and *twelve* charming gold-plated pencil-cases are offered them as prizes in a simple competition.

I have had printed some very pretty leaflets, on one side of which is a reproduction in colours of this cover, advertising "The Pursuit of Sara."

Now what I want Leicester readers to do is this. Write me a post-card, addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, W.C.," with "Leaflets" marked in the top left-hand corner, asking me to send you a small supply of this advertising material. Then you must, in the most ingenious manner you can think of, distribute these to the best advantage. It does not matter *how* you get rid of them as long as the way is helpful to the cause.

When you have distributed your leaflets, write to me and explain your method of doing so. *No replies must come later than first post Wednesday morning, November 11th.*

I WILL then decide, and, of course, my decision is final, which reader's attempt has been most beneficial to the paper. To the best one I will award the Gramophone, and to each of the *twelve* next a gold-plated pencil-case. I should advise you to apply for the leaflets early.

ON the opposite page appears an Unsolved Love Problem, the first of a series.

I am offering *a prize of one guinea* to the reader who sends me, not later than Friday, the 13th inst., what I consider the best way for Edward Clements to get out of his dilemma. The solution should be written in about one hundred words.

State as clearly as possible *why* you believe your solution is the right and honourable thing for him to do, and back up your statement by good, lucid arguments. Replies must be written on one side of the paper only.

Mark your envelopes "Love Problem" in the top left-hand corner, and address them to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C."

Do not forget that the last possible day on which I can receive replies to Problem No. 1 is Friday, the 13th of this month. All arriving after that date will be disqualified.

Your Editor.

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POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **START TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

INTRODUCTION.

CAPTAIN PERCY IDDISON and Lady Maud Hyam, his *fiancée*, are present at an "At Home" given by Lady Medcalf-Mears.

There they meet Isolo Staunton, the lion of the hour, a multi-millionaire, and styled "the modern Monte Christo." The curious feature about him is that, although he is admitted to the very cream of society, nobody knows his past nor how he accumulated his vast wealth.

Wilfrid Ellerton, a fine young fellow, a worthy son of a worthy father, is also there, and is introduced to Iddison.

The latter notices a remarkable streak of white hair on the other's head, running from the front of the left ear down to the base of the skull.

Isolo Staunton also sees this, but it causes him a great deal more anxiety than it does Iddison.

He knows the cause of that streak! He knows why that white hair is present on the head of one so young! He remembers how, when he was Isolo Zuarez, an escaped convict from the Chincha Islands, he was adrift on the ocean in a small boat, together with a man and a boy.

The sun was blazing hot, and there were scarcely any provisions left.

The other man was half dead, and Staunton remembers how he intended to kill him outright so that he should give no further trouble, when the boy hotly intervened.

"Put down that axe," he had cried; "it's murder!" He had lifted the axe and the boy had jumped at him. In doing so he had slipped and the weapon fell on his head!

Both Isolo Staunton and Wilfrid Ellerton were rescued from their peril—but the blow the boy received had rendered him unconscious of all that had happened.

He had never since remembered.

The question that worries the criminal millionaire as he leaves Lady Medcalf-Mears' house is this—would his memory return?

If it should—what a grim irony of Fate it would be.

Staunton's blood is Spanish, his father has been President of Peru, and the ideal for the accomplishment of which he is amassing his many millions is to see Spain reinstated again as Queen of the Seas and Mistress of the East and West!

And now his ideal, his freedom, perhaps his very life hangs on the memory of a mere lad of twenty-three!

If Ellerton remembers the episode on the ocean it will mean, at least, a return to the Chinchas as a convict!

Staunton goes to his magnificent yacht, the *Isola*, lying alongside the Ocean Quay, Southampton, to talk the matter over with his right-hand friend and confidant, Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia.

The latter was another blue-blooded Spaniard, and he was the only person living to whom Isolo Staunton had told the story of his life.

The millionaire tells Valdez of this awkward coincidence of his meeting Ellerton again, and asks his advice.

Valdez strongly urges Staunton to go to extremes to get Wilfrid out of the way, but Isolo is not willing to compass the boy's death.

Then Don Ramiero advises the millionaire to invite to the yacht a Society party, for a trip to Norway. Ellerton is to be one of the guests, and during the cruise steps are to be taken for his removal.

To this plan Staunton agrees and the invitations are sent out.

Mercedes, the beautiful, fascinating daughter of the millionaire, is to do the duties of hostess, and among the guests are Captain Percy Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.

When Mercedes and Ellerton meet, the former recognises the latter as the boy who rescued her from death once, many years ago in Chili.

"Do you remember," says Mercedes, "that afternoon when the Chilenos sacked and burnt Chorillos—when the warships were firing from the sea and the shells were bursting among the houses, blowing their walls out as though a volcano had broken out under them as it did once at Arequipa, and how a scream came through the air, and you, yes, I am sure it was you, caught a little girl—that was I—round the waist and jumped off the pier into the water with her and swam back to the beach—and how we found afterwards that the shell had smashed everything into ruins and killed everyone.

"They told me afterwards what a dreadful ruin it was. But surely you remember, don't you?"

"Remember, of course I do. As if anyone could forget a thing like that. Yes, I can see every detail of it now. I remember the dull, hoarse bang of the gun and the scream of the shells in the air—and you, were you really the little girl that I got hold of and jumped into the sea with because I thought it was going to kill us?"

"Us. I don't think, Mr. Ellerton, that you were thinking very much about *us*——"

The two are drawn together by the bonds of love, and many are the glances that pass between them.

If Staunton had only seen one of these, the crime which had already been decided upon would never have been committed, and many things which came to pass in consequence of it would never have happened.

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SIXTH CHAPTER.

Soul to Soul.

THE rest of the day passed just as pleasantly as one would expect a day to pass, afloat on a summer sea on board what was, perhaps, the most luxurious craft in existence. But there was no chance of a renewal of even that unspoken intercourse which had been so strangely and unexpectedly established between Mercedes and Wilfrid Ellerton. Still less was it possible that their lips should translate into words what their souls had already said to each other through their eyes.

To begin with, the little incident that had taken place before breakfast had a very natural and decided effect on Mercedes. Her instinct told her that Lady Maud had divined the secret which so far she had scarcely dared even to confess to her own consciousness, and the knowledge of this discovery had at once set her maidenly pride in arms. She felt that she had allowed the dearest secret that a woman can have, to become known even before she was quite certain that she had the right to possess such a secret at all; and therefore when, soon after breakfast, Lady Maud laughingly asked her whether she might congratulate her, she somewhat unexpectedly cut her short with a quick little gesture of frankly girlish petulance, and said, almost coldly:

"There is nothing that I know of, Lady Maud, that you or any other can congratulate me upon except, perhaps, upon the fact that I happen to be the daughter of the kindest and most generous of fathers, and that—well, in short, that I have the happiness of being Mercedes Staunton and the pleasure of being your hostess."

There was no possibility of mistaking either the tone or the meaning of the words, spoken as they were with that indescribable dignity that perhaps only Spanish blood can give to speech. Lady Maud at once saw that she had made the grave mistake of treading on what was evidently, for the present at least, forbidden ground, and so, being a young woman of more than ordinary common-sense and social experience, she begged pardon very prettily and in a quite non-committal way, and there the subject dropped.

Naturally the effect of her ill-timed remark was to produce exactly the opposite result to that which she would have wished for. When Mercedes met Ellerton about half-an-hour later she received him with an almost chilling reserve which astonished him almost as much as it hurt him, and so the words which he was so eager to speak remained unspoken, and once more a few trivial words carelessly uttered became, as it were, wheels in that vast machine which so remorselessly spins and weaves the web of human destiny.

It was again the Honourable Percy Iddison who, quite innocently and with the best of intentions, constituted himself the instrument of the Fates by getting up sports after the manner of passengers on ocean liners; and these, on the suggestion of Don Ramiero Valdez, were followed by a concert and dance in the evening, and so, during all that fateful day there came no opportunity for that little explanation whose results might have been so momentous.

But Lady Maud, still true to her conviction in spite of her hostess' almost studied avoidance of Ellerton, had made up her mind to undo, should that be in her power, the somewhat grave error which she now felt more than ever guilty of, and to this end, in the interval between the concert and the dance, she enlisted the by no means disinterested services of an almost equally responsible offender.

"I am perfectly certain, Percy," she said, in a low but nevertheless quite impressive tone as they were leaning over the after-rail, "that this is a clear case of love at first sight, which it is the bounden duty of people in our position to do our utmost to bring to its only proper conclusion, especially as I have an idea that both of us have already done something, quite unconsciously, to hinder, or at any rate to divert the course of true love—I, by a very foolishly premature remark I made this morning on the subject of congratulations, and you by making everybody so busy over these precious sports that the necessary *tête-à-têtes* were quite out of the question."

"All right, Maud. What do you want me to do?"

"Oh, it's only quite a trifle, but I want you to be careful, because its consequences may be very important, and, if the action of the little comedy isn't timed exactly, the plot may fail altogether. That sounds a little mixed, but of course you see what I mean."

"So far, yes," replied the other unconvincingly, "and now suppose the sweetest of conspirators reveals her plot to her most devoted accomplice."

"Don't be silly, Percy, it doesn't suit you," said Lady Maud in a superior tone, but at the same time slipping her hand through the arm that was resting on the rail. "You are never such a hopeless failure as when you are trying to make pretty speeches. Please don't forget that you would never have got through a certain proposal if I hadn't been shameless enough to help you."

In an instant he was seized by powerful hands, a rug was thrown over his head, and he was flung to the floor.

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"It's very simple, dear, but it must be done carefully, and we mustn't raise any suspicions. When the dance is over I am going to inveigle Mercedes up on deck for a breath of sea air. You must watch us and manage to get Mr. Ellerton on the same part of the deck a few moments later."

The Honourable Percy entered heart and soul into the plot, and although the veriest novice at any sort of intrigue which could not be carried out on a battlefield, played his part so well and with such apparent unconsciousness that even Mercedes herself did not suspect anything till Ellerton, who had managed to direct their stroll to the same part of the deck, now happily vacant, on which their unspoken declaration had been so strangely made, stopped and said with such sudden seriousness that it took her completely by surprise, and for the moment compelled her attention:

"Mercedes, you remember what our hearts—our souls, I hope—said to each other here last night?"

The glow of an electric light just above them showed the flush that sprang into her cheeks and the flash in her eyes as she turned them swiftly up to his. She took a step aside to the rail, half turned and faced him, and began in a voice which she vainly tried to keep steady:

"Mr. Ellerton, have I ever given you the right——"

"That is exactly what I have felt myself in honour bound to ask you," he interrupted in a tone as low as hers, yet vibrating with such an intensity of passion that its force instantly swept away the little artificial barriers which Lady Maud had so unwittingly raised for the moment between them. "Unless my love, or, perhaps my presumption, had completely blinded me, your eyes said so last night, and surely they would tell the truth?"

"They did," she whispered, moving towards him ever so little. "Yes, they did, and why should my lips deny it? It was only something that Lady Maud said this morning that, well, vexed me because I thought she had found out, and so——"

"Oh, don't bother about explanations now," he interrupted again, speaking very gently and once more laying his hand on hers as she rested it on the rail. "No doubt you were quite right, though it hurt me a bit; still it was worth a thousand times that to hear you say those two words and to know—what I think I know now. Confound those lights," he added, with sudden inconsequence.

"Why, what is wrong with them?" she asked innocently.

"I want either solitude or Egyptian darkness for about five minutes," he whispered, closing his hand over hers again. "Surely you know why. Heavens! how lovely you are, my beautiful Mercedes!"

"Am I? Then I am glad of it—for your sake," she murmured, her warm Spanish blood flowing swiftly up from neck to brow. She leant back against the rail and laughed softly:

"And so that is why you want the solitude or the Egyptian darkness? What a very unconventional wooing, though! Of course you did begin years ago in the strictly conventional way by gallantly saving my life?"

"Here comes Papa along the deck with Don Ramiero. You won't say anything about it to-night, will you, Wilfrid? There's plenty of time. Let us keep our secret to ourselves for just a little. You know it's a luxury that I, at least, haven't enjoyed before."

"Of course—darling! Is not your wish law now? But if I don't get a kiss soon I shall——"

"No you won't, whatever it is. You have made me feel quite shamefully forward enough for the present. Now please talk about something sensible."

They sauntered on towards Staunton and Valdez, who were puffing slowly at their cigars and talking in low-toned Spanish. It may have been that the Spaniard's keen eyes saw something that escaped his master's as Mercedes and Ellerton strolled past them, chatting about odds and ends of happenings at Cowes. Possibly he did, for he there and then resolved that what had been decided on as to Ellerton's departure to the under-world, should be accomplished without further delay.

The new-made lovers continued their stroll—changing the subject of their conversation the moment they got out of earshot of the other promenaders—until four clear double-strokes on the bell under the navigating-bridge warned them that it was midnight.

"Heavens! Is it as late as that?" exclaimed Mercedes. "I must go below at once or papa will be coming to look for me. Come—Wilfrid, I really must. Why, we nearly have the deck to ourselves."

So they had, at least the after part of it behind the "Council Chamber," and Ellerton was not slow to grasp the possibilities of the situation.

He stopped and the next instant she felt his arm stealing round her waist. For a moment she recoiled, for it was the first time she had felt a man's caress save her father's. Then she remembered that she had already spoken her surrender, and so she yielded.

"Then we will say 'Good night' here," he said, in a whisper as he drew her close to him. "Good night, Mercedes—my darling!"

"Good night—dear!"

She looked up at him, her eyes shining in the moonbeams and her face transfigured in the clear white light, and then their lips met in that eloquent silence in which alone soul speaks to soul.

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Imprisoned Below!

When Wilfrid Ellerton had said good-night to Mercedes at the entrance to the saloon, he took a long cigar out of his case, lit it, and strolled away aft again to think as quietly as his thrilling pulses would let him about this new-found glory of happiness which had so swiftly and unexpectedly shone into his life, and to wonder dimly what he had done to deserve it.

He had always looked upon himself with perfect modesty as a quite ordinary young man to whom the kindly Fates had given it to be born the son of a millionaire, and therefore with far brighter prospects in life than the son of a poor man would have had. For all he had known so far, his friends and acquaintances had just about the same opinion of him, and yet here without, so far as he could see, the slightest merit or desert on his part, the first love of such a girl as Mercedes Staunton had been suddenly, almost without warning, bestowed upon him.

He had perfect health, unsullied youth, an education which was by no means covered by his brilliant school and University career, and the crowning advantage of his father's name and vast wealth; and yet, such was his worship for his strangely-found love that, even with all this in his favour, he looked out into the future with a diffidence which he had never experienced before.

"Good evening, or, I suppose it would be more appropriate to say 'Good morning,' Mr. Ellerton," said a low, softly-modulated voice at his elbow as he was leaning on the after-rail, looking out over the glittering sea-path towards the rising moon and dreaming of unutterable happiness. "A very lovely scene, is it not? And yet those who do not know say that there is no beauty to be found in these northern latitudes of yours."

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A swift whiff of smoke from a very excellent cigar accompanied the words. He turned with a feeling of almost fierce resentment at the interruption of his delicious reverie, and saw Don Ramiero standing beside him.

"Oh, yes, very pretty indeed," he replied, not very graciously; "but for all that I was just thinking that it's about time to turn in."

"Then, in that case, I trust that you will be inclined to defer your thoughts for a few minutes," replied the Spaniard pleasantly, "for, truth to tell, I have just come from our host, who is at this moment with the Captain on the bridge, to ask if you will do him the pleasure of joining him in just one more liqueur or a brandy and soda and a cigar in his own private sanctum here, which I do not think you have yet visited. If you will come with me he will join us in a minute or two."

Under other circumstances Ellerton would have been inclined to make a polite excuse on account of the lateness of the hour, but in view of the interview which he intended to have at no very distant date with his host, that was, of course, quite out of the question, and so he tossed his half-smoked cigar into the sea and said with very real pleasure:

"Thanks, that is exceedingly kind of him. I shall be delighted. After all, one need not be very particular about hours on such a delightful cruise as this. I was only wondering this evening what this place was," he went on, looking at the structure under whose shelter Mercedes had given him his first kiss.

"It is the one apartment in the yacht that our host reserves for his own use," replied Don Ramiero, as he led the way to the door, looking the while keenly about the now deserted decks, "and I can assure you, Mr. Ellerton, that it is not all of his guests who are invited to share his privacy in it."

"Then, of course this is an honour which I shall most highly appreciate," laughed Ellerton.

"The Señor, as we of his intimates call him among ourselves," murmured Don Ramiero, as he opened the double doors by means of the lever handle and an invisible spring, "no doubt has the best of reasons. He is not a man who makes mistakes in the choice of his friends. Will you do me the honour of going in first? The doors are a little difficult to manage."

"Thanks," said Ellerton, as he stepped over the high combing or threshold which is intended to keep the water out of deck cabins in heavy weather.

Just as he raised his foot from the outside deck the Spaniard gave him a sudden thrust forward between the shoulders. He lost his balance and stumbled with an exclamation of angry surprise into the dimly lighted apartment. In an instant he was seized by two powerful hands on each side, a rug was thrown over his head, and he was flung to the floor.

He struggled and tried to shout, but as his assailants forced him over on to his back, the rug, where it covered his face, was drenched with a pungently sweet-smelling liquid. As it soaked through he gasped once or twice for breath, gave one more desperate struggle to free himself, and then his limbs grew heavy, all the blood in his body seemed to rush to his head for a moment and flow back again as quickly; his breathing grew longer and quieter in spite of his will. Then came a swiftly fleeting dream of Mercedes and her melting eyes and trembling lips—and then darkness and oblivion.

A few moments later Don Ramiero's high tenor voice sounded shrilly along the deserted deck, shouting:

"Man overboard! Man overboard! Help! get the boats out! Stop the ship! For God's sake, stop the ship! Mr. Ellerton has fallen overboard!"

Almost instantly his words were echoed, not as an appeal, but as an authoritative command by Isolo Staunton, who had flung the door of the Captain's room under the bridge open and rushed out on deck.

"The bridge, there!" he shouted. "Dead slow—stop! Mr. Marshall, have the hands on deck and get the boats out at once. Great Heavens, how can that have happened? Valdez, come here and tell me about it. Steady, there, men. Not too much noise. We don't want to alarm the ladies. You can pick him up before they know anything about it if you're smart. A hundred pounds to the man who gets hold of him first. Handy now, with those boats!"

While he was speaking the telegraph had tinkled imperatively in the engine-room, and a swift shudder ran through the beautiful fabric of the yacht as the propellers slowed and stopped, and her twenty knots were reduced to ten, and five, and two, and nothing, until she began to drift slowly astern.

Meanwhile the soft "pad, pad" of many naked feet

She laid her hands on her father's shoulders, and looking him full in the eyes, said: "Is that true, father? Is he really—dead?"

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sounded along both sides of the deck, orders were given in low, clear tones; the davits swung outwards, the crews climbed like so many cats into the boats, the falls whistled through the blocks, and they fell almost simultaneously into the water. The tackles were unhooked, and away the four boats sped astern on their eager search for what they would never find.

By this time Don Ramiero was telling Staunton, the Captain, and the First Officer in agitated tones how Mr. Ellerton, leaning too far over the stern-rail to watch the smooth action of the turbine propellers, had overbalanced himself just at the moment that the yacht gave a little pitch aft, and, before he could put out a hand to save him, had disappeared into the foaming wake that the flying yacht was leaving behind her. Then he had shouted for help—to stop the vessel—and that was all. Everything had happened with such appalling suddenness that he was still half-stunned and could hardly realise the calamity.

The recital was a perfect piece of acting, and Isolo Staunton never thought Ramiero Valdez a more valuable ally or a more accomplished scoundrel than he did while he was making it.

The sudden slowing-down and stopping of the yacht had, of course, aroused the guests on board who were going or had already gone to their berths, and a few of the men and one or two ladies who had not yet retired came up on deck to ask what was the matter. But, for quite essential reasons, discipline was as strict on the *Isola* as it was on board a man-of-war, and so, in accordance with Staunton's hurriedly-whispered instructions, the Captain came to the saloon-entrance where they were gathered, and said in his most genial tones:

"Nothing serious, I can assure you, ladies and gentlemen. Only a heated bearing which will take about half an hour to put right. Just the sort of accident that may happen every day even to one of His Majesty's ships, and, as our time is our own, it is, of course, the merest trifle. Pray don't allow it to interfere with your night's rest."

The officers and quartermasters within hearing heard the glibly-spoken lie without moving a muscle, and so the guests were satisfied and went below again.

Only Percy Iddison wondered why a triple-engined, turbine-driven yacht should be stopped for a single heated bearing, and only he happened to notice that four of the boats were missing. It immediately occurred to him that one of the sailors might have fallen overboard, and that their considerate host did not wish to frighten his lady guests. Of course the rescue would be a matter of no difficulty with such perfect equipment and in a smooth sea, and so, being accustomed to discipline himself, he concluded that it was no business of his to interfere, wherefore he held his peace and went below again with the rest.

But the next morning the truth, as Don Ramiero Valdez had arranged it, had to come out. Wilfrid Ellerton did not join the guests as usual in the before-breakfast promenade on the upper deck. Inquiries were made for him and by some mysterious means—no one quite knew how—it became known that his berth had not been occupied during the night. Then Iddison, with something like the feeling that he remembered from his first battle, thought of the missing boats, which were now all in their places again, and of that curious stoppage of all the engines for one paltry heated bearing.

As a matter of fact, he had been looking for Ellerton, with whom, in virtue of the little plot in which he had taken part the night before, he felt that sympathy which between men is akin to friendship, in order to invite him to the early morning cocktail, and not finding him, he had had it by himself.

As he came out of the smoking-room he saw Staunton and Don Ramiero, looking very serious, coming from the direction of the saloon entrance. He took three or four long, quick strides towards them and said abruptly:

"Mr. Staunton, Ellerton is not to be found anywhere on board, and I hear that he did not sleep in his berth last night. Is that true? Has anything happened to him?"

It so came to pass that just at this moment Mercedes strolled past with Lady Maud, to whom she had been apologising for her "foolish rudeness" the day before, and also imparting the most interesting information that one engaged young woman can tell and another hear. They heard Iddison's question and instantly stopped. Lady Maud looked at Mercedes. She was white to the lips. She stared wide-eyed at her father and began to sway a little from side to side. Lady Maud at once flung her arm round her and drew her close to her side. Then Staunton spoke.

"I most deeply regret to be obliged to say, Captain Iddison," he began in a tone whose emotion was most wonderfully simulated, "that last night we deceived you—I hope you will allow me to say with the best of intentions, especially as regards our lady guests—when we told you that our stoppage was due to a slight accident to the engines. The sad truth, which I am now compelled to tell you and my other guests, is that Mr. Wilfrid Ellerton fell overboard shortly after midnight, almost within reach of my friend, Señor Valdez, and that all our best efforts to save him were in vain. You will, I am sure, forgive the deception, for we hoped——"

Before he could utter another word Mercedes had shaken herself free from Lady Maud's arm. She crossed the deck with rapid steps, laid her hands on her father's shoulders, and, looking him full in the eyes, said in a whisper that everyone could hear:

"Is that true, father? Is he really drowned—dead?"

For an instant he looked at the lovely, piteously pleading face of the only being on earth that he loved, and, as he did so, the fatal truth struck home into his soul. His face blanched and his eyes fell before hers. But there was no going back now. What was done was done, and so he replied as steadily as he could:

"Yes, Mercedes, most unhappily it is true!"

"Merciful Heavens!" she murmured. "My life was his, for he saved it—and I loved him—and we only knew last night—and now he is dead—so soon dead!"

And before he could catch her in his arms, she had fallen fainting at his feet.

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

.. In the Council .. Chamber.

As Mercedes fell to the deck her father stooped and lifted her in his arms. For a moment his eyes met those of Valdez, already blank with amazement and fear, in a glance so full of horror and involuntary reproach, that his accomplice shrank away from him for the moment like a criminal suddenly faced with clear proof of his crime. Then he turned and walked rapidly away towards the saloon entrance, saying that he would call Miss Staunton's maid and summon the doctor.

He seemed to pass through an eternity of terrifying emotions during the next few minutes, but they were more of fear for the consequences of his crime than horror of its callous and inhuman wickedness. He knew now that his keen instinct had shown him the truth. He knew that the doomed man loved the daughter of the Lord of the Underworld. That of itself would naturally have been of no moment to him whatever—but the brief, yet terrible scene which he had just witnessed had also told him that Wilfrid Ellerton's love either was already or sometime would be returned. Knowing this, he had deliberately hastened the fate which

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Isolo Staunton's own statement in the presence of his guests had made irrevocable. What would be his fate if this tyrant Croesus, who never forgave even a mistake, came to know of this knowledge?

It had all passed in a few moments, and yet, when they came to compare notes afterwards, it turned out that that swift exchange of strangely-meaning glances had been equally noted by both Lady Maud and her lover.

While she and Lady Medcalf-Mears went to the assistance of Mercedes, Iddison ran a long wicker-chair across the deck, and they laid her in it. By this time Don Ramiero had returned with the maid and Staunton's private physician, who always accompanied him on his yachting trips.

Like all the intimate associates and servants of this despot of an unknown domain, Dr. Eymar Billaud was a man of great ability in his own vocation, who possessed few, if any, moral principles which did not happen to harmonise with the interests of his employer. Isolo Staunton was wont to say in confidence to those who fancied that they were his trusted friends, that all he wanted was talent—genius, if he could get it. But he had no use for principle.

He was a Frenchman born in England and a graduate of both French and English Universities. A man who could pass in the society of both countries as a cultivated citizen of either, and who, save for his whole-souled and utterly heartless devotion to his science, was about as much of a man as he was a chimpanzee—to which poor relation of humanity he bore a quite suggestive facial resemblance.

He felt Mercedes' pulse, slightly raised one of her eyelids, and then, turning to Staunton, he said imperatively and in perfect English:

"Your daughter, sir, is suffering from a sudden and, I fear, very severe mental shock. She is only just alive. Let her be taken to her room at once and put to bed. I will prepare a restorative and make a further examination as soon as possible."

Without another look at his patient, he shuffled off to his own rooms on the main deck, and Mercedes was at once carried below. Lady Maud, who, among her many accomplishments, numbered a highly-trained genius for nursing, at once constituted herself head-nurse and saw that everything needful was done in preparation for the doctor's anxiously awaited visit.

Meanwhile Staunton, by a heroic effort of his imperious will, had regained sufficient composure to be able to say calmly, and yet, as Iddison could not help thinking, in a curiously strained, indeed, almost unnatural tone, to the dozen or so guests who were offering their politely expressed and wholly sincere sympathies:

"I need hardly assure you, ladies and gentlemen, how thankful I am for the sympathy which this sudden and utterly unexpected double catastrophe places me so much in need of. As you know, my daughter is not only my only child, she is all I have in the world, for she is motherless." His voice broke here with genuine emotion. There was a respectful silence for a moment, and he went on:

"Of the tragedy of last night I can hardly trust myself to speak. I will only say what I am sure you are all thinking—that a continuation of what was begun as a pleasure-cruise is now impossible, I and the yacht are entirely at your service, but I think that I shall be best consulting your wishes if I land you at the nearest British port, which I believe will be that of Edinburgh, from which I can telegraph the sad news to Sir Wilfrid Ellerton."

"I am quite sure, Mr. Staunton, that we all entirely agree with you. There is really nothing else to be done," said Lady Medcalf-Mears, to whom common consent had given, as it were, the social mothership of the little party.

Just then the head steward came and announced that breakfast was ready, as, of course, no bugle could be blown. The meal was a mournful function, made yet more so by the anxiety of waiting for the doctor's report. Staunton had shut himself up with his own bitter thoughts in the Council Chamber to wrestle with the ghastly situation which his deliberately-planned and ruthlessly-executed crime had created. He had given orders for Dr. Billaud to be sent to him the moment that the examination was concluded, but more than half-an-hour of torturing apprehension, mingled with impotent raging against the unforeseen penalty which had so strangely fallen upon him, passed before Don Ramiero opened the double doors and brought him in.

"Well, doctor," he said, in hard, strained tones, as they entered. "What is it? Brain fever? I may as well know the worst at once."

"My dear sir," replied Billaud, "I regret to say your daughter is suffering greatly. I cannot even tell you what the effects will be until they begin to develop."

"Not even what they may be?" asked Staunton, in a tone of almost pitiful anxiety.

"I do not care to prophesy," replied the doctor. "But from what I have seen the best that I can promise you is that there will be a period of acute delirium following the present condition of collapse, and that will be succeeded by a period of great weakness and depression, which will also be the period of the greatest danger. Fortunately Miss Staunton has an almost perfect constitution, and I have little fear of getting her through. There is, however," he continued, noticing a sudden look of relief in the hitherto dully staring eyes of his employer, "another contingency for which it will be necessary for you to be prepared."

"And that?" asked the millionaire, with a nervous start.

"It is quite possible," Billaud went on, the ghost of a smile flitting across his thin, almost ape-like lips, "that the ultimate development of your daughter's case, sir, may be this. I should first give you to understand that brain lesions resulting from severe mental shock——"

"Good Heavens, man, do you think I want to sit here and listen to a medical lecture?" exclaimed Staunton passionately, as he got up from his chair and began to walk up and down the room with quick, jerky strides. "Come to the point, please, and tell me straight out what more there is to fear."

Dr. Billaud was, not unnaturally, somewhat offended by the abruptness of the interruption, but he knew his position too well to resent it openly. Still he did not forget a prompt revenge.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said deferentially, "you will see that only my extreme interest in the case was leading me into technicalities, quite out of place here, as I admit. To be quite brief, then, it is possible that there may be a very great similarity between the mental condition of Miss Staunton when she recovers her physical health and that of the young gentleman whom, for the present, I suppose I may call my other patient."

The words were quietly, almost gently spoken, and yet they went home into Isolo Staunton's consciousness like so many hammer-strokes. There was no mistaking their meaning; but after one terrible look at Valdez which sent a shiver into his soul, he stopped in his walk and, stooping over Billaud with clenched hands as though he were going to strike him, said in a hoarse, shaking voice:

"What do you mean? Explain yourself clearly, can't you! Don't torture me any longer!"

"My dear sir," said the Frenchman, shrinking back a little into his chair, "nothing, I assure you, could be further from my thoughts. I will express myself in the plainest words. I have reason to fear that when your daughter recovers, although her physical and mental health will probably be quite perfect, the effects of the shock will be found to have completely erased the events of this morning from her memory, and that she will return to reason in absolute ignorance of the untimely decease of Mr. Ellerton which you so feelingly described to your guests before breakfast."

For a few moments the three men looked at each other in silence. Dr. Billaud sat with compressed lips and frowning brows, something like a judge who has just delivered a weighty decision. Staunton stood motionless, leaning against the table, gripping the edge of it with his hands. Then Don Ramiero crossed himself and murmured in Spanish:

"Heavens! if that is so, it will be the act of God! Señor,

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Señor, cannot the wrong be undone even now? He is down yonder alive and well. Can we not——"

"No!" shouted Staunton. "No, we cannot, thanks to your meddling! Was not the affair first arranged for to-night? Where was your authority to do it last night? Had you any reason? Did you suspect that there might be love between them? You have been a good and faithful servant, Ramiero, but if I thought you had done that without telling me, by Jupiter! you should go down yonder with *him* and never see the light of day again!"

Dr. Billaud turned and looked at Don Ramiero. His swarthy complexion had turned almost grey. His lips were trembling and his pupils were dilated by fear—for he had seen that underworld of which Isolo Staunton was absolute lord, and he knew how awful such a fate might be made. By a supreme effort he managed to steady his shaking nerves, and exclaimed, with a note of reproach in his voice:

"No, Señor, no! How could you think such treason of one whose life is lived only in your interests? No! On my faith and honour, I knew nothing of this!"

Fortunately for him his master was too heavily stricken for the moment to take much notice either of his words or the manner of their utterance; but Billaud never took his eyes off his face, and his keen eyes saw that he was lying. There was little love lost between the Spaniard and the Frenchman, who was by no means displeased by his discovery, which might possibly be useful later on.

"That will do, Ramiero," said Staunton, in an altered voice, as his sudden passion died down. So far as he liked and respected any man, he liked and perhaps, to a greater extent, respected his father's faithful friend and counsellor, and already he repented his outburst of fury. "I am sorry! No doubt you acted to the best of your judgment. But, alas, I fear that there is no repairing what you have done. Will there be no cure for my daughter, Billaud, should she prove to be afflicted as you fear?" he went on, turning quickly to the other with a glance which for such a man was almost pathetic.

"My dear sir and most generous patron," replied the Frenchman with an admirably simulated note of emotion in his voice, "there is only one thing that I would not do in your service, and that is knowingly deceive you."

He looked hard at Valdez as he said this, as though he would add: "as others of your faithful servants do," and continued, "But, pray remember, I have not said that this result is inevitable. I only fear it, and therefore it was my duty to tell you of my fear. But if it does come there is only one possible remedy for it—and that is impossible."

"The possible impossible!" echoed Staunton eagerly. "How can that be? Surely you would not indulge in paradoxes on such a subject. What do you mean?"

"I mean, sir," answered Billaud slowly, "that the only cure for such a malady would be that Miss Staunton should again meet and talk with a man who, by your own statement and your own judgment, is already as good as dead."

"My God, yes, that is true!" Staunton gasped as the pitiless logic of the physician's words was irresistibly borne in on his brain. "Was there ever such a hideous tangle spread for the feet of man? No, no, Billaud, you are right. It is cruel, deadly cruel, and to my own darling, too! But there is no help for it!

"Yes, it is done!" he continued, in his old imperious tone as though in this moment he had already risen from the depths into which he had been stricken. "As we make our fate we must accept it, good or evil. She shall forget him, even as the world will."

"Then I presume, Señor," said Valdez, rising with a very distinct feeling of relief, "that you wish the original plan to be duly carried out?"

"In every detail," replied the despot in his usual cold, even tones. "We are now heading for the Firth of Forth, which we should reach this evening. My guests will land at Leith, and I shall do the same, as I intend to convey the—ah!—the sad tidings personally to Sir Wilfrid. You will remain in charge as usual, Ramiero, and to you, Doctor, I shall intrust my daughter. You shall have the two best trained nurses that money can hire in Edinburgh, and then you will, of course, prescribe a sea trip and complete isolation for your patient. The *Isola* will then proceed to the Anchorage, where you, Ramiero, will get rid of your charge and then bring away any cargo that may be ready for you."

And so, in these few words, spoken as calmly as though he were issuing the most commonplace of sailing orders, Isolo Staunton, so far as lay in his power, sealed the earthly fate of the only man on whom his beloved Mercedes had looked with the melting eyes of love.

NINTH CHAPTER.

Suspicions!

When the *Isola* reached Leith, which, thanks to her great speed, she did on the evening of the same day, Lady Maud parted very unwillingly from her charge, who, after Doctor Billaud had managed to administer the restorative he had prepared, had lain in a state of semi-consciousness all day.

In common with the other guests, she could not help thinking that the proposed arrangement was a somewhat strange one, especially in view of the fact that their host had decided to leave his daughter while she was in such a critical state, in order to carry the news of Wilfrid Ellerton's death personally to his father.

She had offered—nay, so far as the conventions permitted, she had almost asked—to go with her on the sea-trip which the physician had prescribed; but Staunton had declined so decisively, albeit most cordially, that she felt it hopeless to press the point. "He had the best of reasons for having every possible confidence in his friend Doctor Billaud," he had said; "and as he had made a point of having two trained nurses under him, Lady Maud would see that it was not only unnecessary, but impossible for him to avail himself of her most kindly and generous offer." After which, of course, there was nothing else to be said.

"I don't half like it, Maud," said the Honourable Percy, after a long pause, as they were strolling about the next morning enjoying the glorious view from the summit of Arthur's Seat.

"You don't like what, my dear Percy?" she asked. "Are you thinking about poor Mr. Ellerton and Mercedes?"

"Yes," he replied decisively, "and about our late host and the yacht and—well, about lots of things."

"Yes," she said; "I suppose that is only a natural thing for all of us to do under such terrible circumstances. For my part, I confess I have done nothing else since yesterday morning. But you have not answered my question. Surely you don't suspect anything—anything wrong, do you?"

"I can't say that I do or I don't," he returned, after another pause. "But for all that there are two things that I can't get over. In the first place, that fellow Valdez, who, for all his fine Spanish manners, I can't bring myself to like——"

"No, neither can I," Lady Maud interrupted quickly. "I'm rather glad we think the same on that point. Well?"

"Well, his story was that Ellerton, a young fellow who is not only a very good athlete, but who has been a sailor for some years, overbalanced himself and fell overboard like a baby or a drunken man from the deck of a yacht in a perfectly

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smooth sea. Now, does that strike you as being very likely on the face of it?"

"N-o, I can't say that it does, now that you put it that way," she replied in a somewhat awed tone, "but surely you don't mean there could be a possibility of anything like foul play. What earthly reason could there be for such a thing?"

"Then there was that look which Staunton gave Valdez when he picked his daughter up. Now, I've seen men stalking each other down like wild beasts; I've seen them blazing away at each other at close quarters; and I've seen them struggling together for dear life on the top of a precipice; but I tell you that I've never seen more concentrated hate and fury in one man's eyes, or more abject fear in another's, than I did yesterday morning in Staunton's and that Spaniard's. I've had very good reason, I can assure you, to know that men don't look at each other like that without some very good cause."

"Percy," said Lady Maud with a faint little smile, "there's one thing quite certain. You are distinctly in earnest on the subject."

"Yes, I'm what my young friend Fenning Brandon, the American Minister's son, you know, would call in dead earnest on this business.

"I've lots of friends here in England and all over the place, and the Governor and dear old Rollo and Queenie; —by the way, I wonder why *they* refused this mysterious millionaire's invitation on what I know to be absolutely false pretences, now I come to think of it?—have tons of influence and all that sort of thing, and I'll work it for all it's worth. Of course there may be nothing in it, but there'll be the sport of the hunt, anyhow, even if we don't kill in the end."

"My dearest of big boys and heroes!" exclaimed Lady Maud, stopping short and looking up at him with a dazzling smile, which made him wish fervently that the place was not quite so public. "That's splendid; and I believe you're right—I believe that there *is* something in it, and, as *my* American friend, Cora Kesteven, would put it, 'I'm right there with you all the time, if you think a woman's wit will be of any use and you'll have me?"

"Well, as we're going to have one another for better or worse before very long, and as you're several thousand times cleverer than I ever learnt how to be, we'll just make that another compact between us, and," he went on, taking her by the arm, "in a more suitable time and place we'll duly sign, seal, and deliver it. And now I'm hungry, and I don't think we shall be much more than in time for lunch."

"If there is one thing that I like about you more than another," she laughed, as she freed her hand from his arm and turned towards the sloping path, "it is that magnificent appetite of yours. I consider it a most happy augury for the future. It is almost impossible for a man with an appetite like that to be ill-tempered as long as it can be satisfied—and I hope I shall always be able to do that."

"I hope so," he said, as he pulled her hand through his arm, "you have no idea what a pig I am when I'm hungry. Hullo! Look down yonder, Maud, over the water. Is that our friend got away already? By Jove, he's been pretty quick about those nursing arrangements and the rest of it. Money again, I suppose. Let me have a look for a moment."

She took her hand from his arm and he got his field-glasses out of the case and put them to his eyes.

"Yes, that's the *Isola* right enough," he went on, as he focussed them, "and isn't she just spinning through it! Here, take a look. What a lovely craft she is! I should like to have young Billy's opinion of her."

"The young Billy" to whom he alluded was the Honourable William Anson Iddison, Lieutenant in the Navy, and presently second in command of His Majesty's Destroyer *Scorcher*. He was already, at twenty-two, the possessor of two medals, the Chinese and the Distinguished Service, and his most pious wish was for the promotion of his esteemed Commander to a position of dignity on board a cruiser. He loved the black, ugly, bull-nosed little *Scorcher*, and naturally wanted her for himself.

"Yes, there she goes," said Lady Maud when she had got the glasses right. "She is lovely, as you say. It seems incredible that anything so beautiful should be used for any evil purpose, so let us hope, for her sake as well, that we are wrong."

"With pleasure," he laughed rather grimly, putting out his chin a little, "but for all that I'd give something to be on board her this trip with Billy and two or three of his boys disguised as quarter-masters."

A good deal of light would have been thrown in places which Lady Maud and her lover were beginning to think so dark, if either of them could have listened to a parting conversation between Staunton, Don Ramiero, and Doctor Billaud in the Council Chamber half-an-hour before the *Isola* sailed.

For the first time in his active life, Isolo Staunton had repented him of the evil that he had done, not for repentance sake, but because of that greater evil which, all unknowingly, he had brought upon the one human being for whom his heart held a tender human feeling. He had passed a night of sleepless torment, raging vainly against what promised to be the inevitable consequences of his own act, till at last his love for Mecedes had overcome even his iron purpose, and for her sake, he had decided to run the tremendous risk of a compromise with Fate.

"I quite see the force of your arguments, gentlemen," he said towards the close of the conversation, "and I am entirely satisfied that you have been thinking only of my interests; but I have counted the risk, and for my daughter's sake I am prepared, in fact, resolved to take it. If the operation which you will perform, Doctor Billaud, does not restore your patient's past memory, then some excuse must, and shall be found, to bring him back to life. If, on the other hand, it does, then I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that his departure from the upper to the under world is not only necessary, but inevitable."

"Very well, sir," replied the Frenchman, "since that is your decision it shall be done. Señor Valdez and I have warned you, and therefore our duty in that regard is performed."

Thus was it decided that the captive on board the *Isola* should have one chance for his liberty and perhaps his life.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

TO PARENTS.

THE Editor of THE BOYS' LEADER offers a situation in the offices of this firm at a salary of £100 a year to commence with to a boy, and a like situation of £100 a year to a girl.

The two successful competitors will be given the choice, after we have arranged with their parents, of entering either the editorial department, the art department, or the counting-house, so that every opportunity will be given to the boy or girl who shows any particular tendency towards one of these classes of work.

In addition to these two handsome awards, a further hundred consolation gifts will be distributed amongst those who come next. The conditions under which these offers are made are very simple. In THE BOYS' LEADER, published on Tuesday, November 3rd, will appear the following set of questions:

1.—Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?

2.—What famous British soldier is known as "Bobs"?

3.—Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?

4.—Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?

5.—Which is your favourite book, and why?

6.—When was King Edward VII. born? Give year and day.

The boy and girl who most successfully answers all the questions set will be considered the winner.

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Father's Consent.

CARRIE: "Did you see father, Arnold?" Arnold: "Yes, it's all settled." Carrie: "He gave his consent?" Arnold: "Yes; he said that a girl that was out driving and yachting and bicycling as much as you didn't need much of a home, anyway. Not very nice, was it?"

When the Lights are Low.

SHE: "When is a comfortable position uncomfortable?" He: "When anyone enters the room suddenly."

She Was Tired of Waiting.

HE: "Ethel, what can it mean? Last night I dreamt that I proposed to you." She: "I should say that you are more sensible asleep than awake."

The Very Reason.

"WHY don't you think of marriage?" asked the gushing young thing of thirty odd summers. "I do," answered the cynic. "It's thinking of it that keeps me a bachelor."

He Proposed Once Too Often.

WIFE: "When you proposed to me, John, did you think I would accept you?" Husband: "Not the first time." "The second?" "I wasn't going to propose more than once."

More Bachelor's Advice.

"THERE are two kinds of girls a fellow should never flirt with." "Oh, really?" "The girls who are so young they don't know any better, and the girls who are so old they mean business."

That Settled It.

"No, sir," exclaimed the irate sire, "my daughter can never be yours." "Quite right, sir," replied the cool youth; "she couldn't possibly be my daughter, but she's going to be my wife."

Better Late Than Never.

"INTELLIGENCE has just reached me," began Mr. Blodger, as he sat down to the dinner table. "Thank Heaven, if it has at last," exclaimed Mrs. Blodger. The meal was partaken of in silence.

Then He Squirmed.

"IF you insist on breaking our engagement, Miss Fickle, I shall make your letters public." "You are welcome to do so, Mr. Scamper; there is nothing in them that I am ashamed of, except the address on the envelope."

A Distinction With a Difference.

ANGRY FATHER-IN-LAW: "Didn't you tell me when you married my daughter that you were worth £40,000?" Son-in-Law: "No, sir; I said that I could lay my hands on £40,000; but had I done so I should now be in gaol."

He Should Have Said "Less Beautiful."

RICH HEIRESS: "But, Captain Hawleigh, would you love me when I grow old and ugly?" The Captain (gallantly): "You may grow older, my dear Miss Crœsus, but you can never grow uglier." And he wondered why she rejected him.

A Reassuring Simile.

SHE was going away. "Oh, John!" she sobbed. "J-John, are y-you quite sure you'll m-miss me?" "Darling," replied her big husband, "I'll miss you as much as I do the morning train." Thus assured, she picked up her bag, and, with a weet smile, started for the seaside

Sisterly Love Again.

HE: "She looks as proud as though the whole world is under her feet!" She: "Well, she's right! Did you ever see her feet?"

Made a Name for Herself.

ISORA: "Your name is so curious." Azile: "Yes; I'm named after my rich aunt, Eliza; but I reversed it, as it looks so much nicer."

Severely Reprimanded.

WALTER (aged five): "Papa, when I grow up may I get married?" Papa: "My son, I regret to see you anticipating trouble so early in life."

How Very Provoking.

"HER marriage was a great disappointment to her friends." "Indeed?" "Oh, yes. They all predicted it would turn out unhappily, and it didn't."

The Chief Inducement.

SHE: "I don't want to marry you. I don't even want to talk to you!" He (a widower), eagerly: "That's the very reason I want you to marry me!"

A Competent Critic.

HE: "That must be a very interesting book you are reading." She: "Oh, it's awfully exciting! The heroine changes her gown six times in the first chapter."

There Had Been Rumours Before.

MAMIE: "I hear you are going to be married again." Edith: "Again? Why, I've never been married at all yet." "No; but I can't recall the number of times you were 'going to be.'"

Good Indication.

IDA: "Why do you like Harry? He kisses you so awkwardly." May: "That's just why I like him. If he went about it in a graceful manner I would know he had long been practising."

A Grievous Libel.

CUSTOMER: "Why doesn't Miss Robinson deal at your shop now?" Grocer: "One of my assistants insulted her." Customer: "How?" Grocer: "She overheard him telling someone that she was our oldest customer."

He Was so Considerate.

TOM: "Why are you so melancholy, old man?" Jack: "Miss Jones rejected me last night." Tom: "Well, never mind, there are others." Jack: "Yes, of course, but somehow I can't help feeling sorry for the poor girl."

George Would Not Object.

SHE: "Albert, I have come to the conclusion that I love George better than I love you, and——" He: "What about the engagement ring I gave you to wear?" She: "Oh, that's all right. George says he won't object if I wear it."

There Was a Reason.

MRS. MAINCHANCE (sentimentally): "I declare, darling, you hold the umbrella over me just as carefully as you did in our courting days—more carefully, if anything." Mr. Mainchance (prosaically): "I didn't have to buy your millinery in those days, Myrtilla."

His Courage Failed.

SENIOR PARTNER: "My dear Muller, you had the courage to save my daughter from drowning. You deserve to be rewarded. I will give you my daughter in marriage." Muller (bookkeeper): "It is really very kind of you; but I am not so courageous as you seem to think."

Real Economy.

ANXIOUS HUSBAND (at dinner): "Really, dear, turkey again? I'm afraid we won't manage at this rate!" Wife: "Really, dear, it's *all* management. I made so much turkey-stuffing that I had to order two more birds so that not a crumb should be left. Now you see how economical I am, you goose!"

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The Man and the Foolish Little Girl.

A Correspondence That Brought an Alliance.

Once there was a Foolish Little Girl—that is, people (mostly her friends) called her that, for had she not been besought by three different men to be a wife, and had she not an equal number of times refused? And they were very "eligible," these men—they had much to offer in worldly goods, were pleasant to look upon, and they loved the Foolish Little Girl. But she shook her wayward head and elevated her dimpled chin and said "No!" three times very distinctly.

One day she did something to amuse herself. She saw an advertisement like this, in a newspaper: "Correspondence desired with bright, refined young woman. Object, to pass the time. Address A. B., &c.," and she answered.

They exchanged two letters each and then became confidential. Now, odd as it may seem, one will often reveal things to a practical stranger, particularly if it be under cover of mystery and such circumstances as surrounded these correspondents, that one would never confide to one's dear friend. Thus it happened that after the second letter each told the other a few things.

Said the Man to the Foolish Little Girl: "I am tired of everything—I hate Society—I haven't money enough to travel the world over as I would like—and I hate people in general and girls in particular, for it's all the fault of a girl that I'm in this discordant tone of mind. I want to get interested in something and I hit upon this scheme as being original and cheaper than a trip abroad. It's already succeeding. Tell me something about yourself and how you came to answer my advertisement."

The Little Girl wrote back among other things: "Perhaps my reasons are similar to your own—perhaps I haven't any reasons, but whether I have or not I'm being amused and that is something that hasn't happened since last summer when I knew—well, him—just him—no matter who he was or why I lost him. Nobody knows of it. No one in my family would sympathise if they did, but perhaps you can, for you have learnt your lesson too."

Their letters were frequent and long after this and were not so very silly, all things considered. One day something quite exciting happened. The Man touched upon a certain incident of his past summer holiday.

"The quarrel came so suddenly," he wrote, "so like the proverbial thunderbolt from a sunny sky, and she had grown so dear to me that I couldn't realise all at once that anything so ugly could come between us. In my surprise the words of explanation came haltingly. She misunderstood, and before I knew it she had said a few quick sentences and left me there, trying to comprehend what had happened.

Exactly at this point the Little Girl's big eyes began to open bigger than usual, and soon she let the paper fall from unheeding fingers and stared and stared at nothing while strange scraps of things pieced themselves together in her mind. Then she came to earth again, picked up the letter and read it through to the end, where for the first time his name stood forth fully instead of the old "A. B."

"Why didn't I guess it before?" said she to herself. "Who else could ever write such descriptions of that dear old place? Why nobody but us ever knew about that cove in the bay."

Then a sudden thought made her eyes open big again. "I wonder—I won-der—I w-o-n-d-e-r——" Then a violent headshake—"why, no! of course he doesn't know."

But he did. He knew after the very first confidential letter. For she was a very Foolish Little Girl, and she wrote her heart out in those letters.

Then another thing happened. One day the mamma of the Foolish Little Girl found a note. Note said, "Mamma, dear—when I return I shall be Mrs. Alden Brice. He's the one in the golf suit that you hated so last summer. He isn't very rich and I know what you all will say. But it has to be."

She was not so very foolish after all! **May Harney.**

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Illustrated London News. Everyone seems to know instinctively when one has too much or too little flesh upon one's bones, and the time may come to many when the burden grows oppressive and causes alarm. To such sufferers "Antipon" should prove advantageous, because it not only speedily absorbs and throws out of the system all superabundant adipose matter but increases strength and vitality.

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Weldon's Ladies' Journal. Readers troubled with *embonpoint* will find in "Antipon" a reliable and permanent cure, exceedingly pleasant to take, and, being a powerful fat absorbent, it dissolves and eliminates from the body all superfluous adipose, both the internal fat and the subcutaneous.

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A WOMAN'S HATE.

The Story of a Lover's Disappearance and a Girl's Faith.

THE news spread like wildfire that Brian Wyndhurst had taken the cheque for one thousand pounds, drawn but unsigned, had forged the signature of the head of the firm, cashed the cheque and absconded. The excitement in the large office was tremendous; it came like a thunderbolt on all the clerks and employées; and when it was carried from the premises of Morgan and Sons to the ears of Marian Arnold, Brian's sweetheart, it seemed to stiffen every muscle and nerve in her body and turn her to stone.

For a full minute she stood in this apparently petrified condition, gazing at her aunt with eyes that saw nothing; then she sank in a limp mass on the couch from which she had hastily risen. When she had sufficiently recovered to ask questions, she demanded more particulars.

"The gentleman is a detective," responded Mrs. Arnold uneasily. "Do you think you can go through the ordeal, Marian? He will ask you all manner of things about Brian."

"I must go through it," returned Marian firmly. "In the interest of justice—and Brian! There is some dreadful mistake! He could not do such a thing!"

"Well, collect yourself, my dear!" exhorted Mrs. Arnold, still mentally troubled. "Brian always seemed a nice, steady young fellow, but they hint at betting and—but I'll show him in!" she added hurriedly, as she saw the colour coming back with a rush to Marian's cheeks and interpreted that circumstance as the raising of the storm cone.

Detective-Inspector Mostyn entered and took the proffered seat; he began his business tactfully, and it did not take him long to place Marian in possession of all known facts and all conjectures.

Brian Wyndhurst was a trusted clerk in the firm; he was the only son of the woman whom John Morgan had loved but failed to win. When Brian was left an orphan, with scarcely a penny in the world, John Morgan had taken him in hand. Brian had been educated and then placed in a large commerical office; it was tacitly understood that if he showed sufficient capacity, he would ultimately become a partner.

Every Friday it was necessary to draw £1,000 from the bank by means of an open cheque for the purpose of paying the clerks and factory hands who were in receipt of weekly wages. This was done early on Friday morning and a special cheque book was used for these wages cheques. It was part of Brian's duty to take charge of this cheque book in a safe; he would write the cheque and Mr. Morgan would sign it on Friday morning; occasionally, in order to be ready, the cheque would be drawn on Thursday evening, although not signed till the next morning.

Brian generally cashed the cheque, taking most of it in gold, some in silver, and a small proportion in notes; he was usually accompanied by another clerk and they drove in a cab from the doors of the bank to the factory, where most of the money was left, and then back to the office. Once or twice Brian had cashed the cheque alone, laughing when the grey-haired cashier shook his head disapprovingly at the probable danger incurred by Brian.

What had occurred on the present occasion? Brian had left the office as usual on Thursday evening, but he did not put in an appearance on Friday morning. It was nearly eleven o'clock when the firm received a telegram from him, to the effect that he was not well enough to come to the office. Thereupon Mr. Morgan had taken his duplicate key from the drawer in his private safe and had opened the one in Brian's charge where the cheque book was usually kept, in order to sign the wages cheque and have it cashed. To his amazement the cheque was missing! The counterfoil was duly filled up, but the all-important slip of paper was gone. Mystified, but not especially uneasy as the cheque did not bear the necessary signature, he drew another himself and went off in a cab with a clerk to the bank to cash it. On his arrival, he received the stunning intelligence that a cheque had already been cashed and was shown the one which he had missed!

It bore his signature; he knew it was a forgery, but it was so cleverly done that he could not detect any flaw himself till he had subjected it to a searching examination through a pocket microscope.

Explanations followed. A slightly-built young fellow had cashed it, alone; he brought a letter of introduction from the firm and had a cab at the door. He said that Mr. Wyndhurst was ill.

The letter produced was typewritten on the firm's paper and signed by John Morgan—another clever imitation. Inquiries were at once made and the police informed. Brian, it was found, had not returned home last night, but had wired to say that he would stay with a friend. His drawers at the office, as well as the safe, were examined, and the state of the contents suggested that Brian had intended to abscond. Further examination was being made in order to ascertain whether his books had been falsified and whether he had been guilty of other thefts, but everything was in order so far. The only clue was a paper, evidently written by Brian under the influence of some strong agitation; this paper was a mass of figures with odd letters, indicative of betting transactions, and it also contained the name of a woman, Clara Beale.

That was all. Could Miss Arnold say anything of Brian's movements on the previous evening? Had she—hem!—any reason to suppose that Mr. Wyndhurst had been betting or——

"He always condemned gambling in unmeasured terms!" declared Marian decisively.

The detective was on the point of observing that people sometimes strongly condemn a thing as a cloak, while they do that same thing all the time; but he remembered himself just in time.

"I have not seen Mr. Wyndhurst, or heard from him, since Wednesday evening," said Marian. "I expected him to-night and if he doesn't come, I shall conclude that some evil has befallen him! I fear it is so, for he is the soul of honour and would not be guilty of so wicked a crime, so great an act of ingratitude!"

"Precisely!" acquiesced the officer, just a little drily. He had heard of that sort of thing so often! Such confidence was creditable to human nature, but it wasn't business from his point of view! "Was he all right on Wednesday evening, Miss Arnold? Not worried at all, but just as happy and buoyant as usual?"

"He *did* appear somewhat worried," admitted Marian hesitatingly. "He said that he might have something to tell me soon, but"—she blushed—"I understood that remark in a way which you will not understand!"

"Exactly!" remarked the detective sympathetically, but

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looking much more alert. "Didn't explain what he was going to tell you soon, I suppose?"

"No! But surely you do not think him guilty? You are not looking for him in order to arrest him?"

Marian half rose from the couch in indignation, but dropped back again.

"We must find Mr. Wyndhurst, Miss Arnold,' was the evasive answer, "and then we shall get at the truth!"

The officer took his departure and Marian waited feverishly till the evening was far advanced, hoping against hope that Brian would appear; but he came not, and with a sharp pain at her heart she lay on her bed to pass the night in sleeplessness, and gradually forming the determination to join in the search herself on the morrow, if no tidings came of her missing lover. The morning journal brought her the intelligence that Brian Wyndhurst was suspected of the robbery and was being sought by the police with a view to his arrest.

Marian Arnold found herself face to face with a condition of things which demanded all her courage and which would have the effect of either crushing her and destroying her love for Brian Wyndhurst or transforming her from the simple, placid maiden into a woman of energy and determination. She was pretty, with attractive ways and a simple trustfulness calculated to charm a young man of such virility as Brian, just as his very manliness drew him to her as the one who would be capable of protecting her. She loved him, she had told herself, but she had never sounded the depths of her heart to learn how much she loved him. She was content to trust him, believing that he would do his best to make the path of life smooth for her, while she was filled with a mild determination to help him in his troubles and share his joys.

And in the course of a few hours, circumstances had effected a great change. This danger to Brian had removed the mist from her mental vision; she could clearly perceive those sterling qualities which had been but dimly visible to her; during the night of bitter anxiety and reflection she had probed the depths of her heart and had discovered the profundity of her love for Brian. The old placidity was gone; the Marian Arnold of that morning was a woman with a resolute countenance that denoted a set purpose.

Mrs. Arnold watched her niece with some anxiety; she was afraid that the girl would suddenly faint or go into a fit of hysterics; she was totally unprepared for what did occur, and it startled her a great deal more than a fainting fit would have done.

"Aunt," said Marian suddenly, breaking a long silence, "I am going out to-day to do what I can to find Brian!"

"But, my child, you cannot do anything!" expostulated Mrs. Arnold, when she had sufficiently recovered from her astonishment to be able to speak. "The detectives have the case in hand; they are more capable than you can be of——"

"I know," interrupted Marian quietly. "But there is one great difference between the detectives and myself—a difference which, I think, gives me an advantage. I am in love with Brian Wyndhurst, and love, although blind in some respects, is very sharp-sighted in others. I may find a clue which they have missed! They start with the assumption that Brian is guilty; I am confident that he is innocent. We shall view the facts from different standpoints. I am convinced that there is some plot against Brian!"

Mrs. Arnold remained silent; she did not feel so confident about Brian's innocence. He was a good fellow, but young men sometimes give way to temptation. However, she did not argue with Marian; twenty-four hours previously she would have spoken out boldly enough, but this Marian was not the niece of the past! So she held her tongue.

"I shall go to see Mrs. Mead, Brian's landlady; afterwards I shall call on Mr. Morgan!" declared Marian as she rose from the breakfast table. She had forced herself to eat in order to maintain her strength.

She carried her plans into execution. Mrs. Mead was somewhat perturbed by the visit at first, but she warmed to Marian when they were seated in her scrupulously clean, though humble parlour.

"So that is all you know?" queried Marian, fixing her keen

The Terrible Turk.

"He is a pitiless monster," writes one correspondent; and another, "Wherever he goes there is misery." Hard sayings, these, and all summed up in the word "unspeakable," applied to the Turk by Mr. Gladstone. It is matter for debate whether any nation is so bad as this. Of most people or things some good can be urged, but none of indigestion, which is responsible for more misery than a million Turks in arms could produce. It is the function of food to make rich, pure blood, and to sustain muscles, brain and nerves. When food fails to do this, the digestive organs are at fault, and only Mother Seigel's Syrup can set them right again. Seigel's Syrup is a gentle tonic, compounded of fruits, roots, and herbs, which assists nature to do its own work in its own way, regulating the system and stimulating the liver to healthy activity.

Marriage and Health.

Married men live longer than single men. So, at least, a study of the United States census returns would seem to indicate. But though marriage may be conducive to longevity, it certainly does not secure immunity from indigestion, biliousness, and the host of weakening and distressing ailments which have their origin in a disordered stomach and a torpid liver. Yet even that may be secured by the timely and regular use of Mother Seigel's Syrup, a natural tonic and digestant made of fruits, roots, and herbs. "For years I was a martyr to indigestion and biliousness, and was afraid to eat at all. Thanks to Seigel's Syrup I am now as well as I could wish to be." So says Mrs. Rose Warboys, of 100 Queen Street, Hitchin.

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eyes on Mrs. Mead, after the landlady had repeated the particulars already made known. "You can tell me nothing more, nothing? You know what has been said — that he betted and that the name of a woman, not my name, was found on a paper in his drawer?"

Marian, full of loving trustfulness in Brian, waited for an emphatic reply that would confirm her own views; but Mrs. Mead looked half frightened, and gazed confusedly at the carpet. "Poor girl!" she murmured; "I really ought to tell her, for if she has been deceived, she ought to know it!" Marian saw the landlady's confusion; it struck a chill to her heart, but she cast aside the doubt and pressed the question.

"Well, miss, it'll be best for me to tell you," she answered slowly. "Mr. Wyndhurst *did* have something to do with another lady, because she came here for him once, and I believe he met her elsewhere. I'll tell you what I know, but for goodness' sake you mustn't tell the police that you've got it from me! They would send me to prison for hiding the facts! But I did it to save him, for he was a nice young gentleman and perhaps it was a first false step and——"

"Tell me all!" demanded Marian, her cheeks paling. "You may help me to save him!"

The last remark was ambiguous, and Mrs. Mead interpreted it to mean that Marian Arnold wished to assist Brian to escape the consequences of his false step. Mrs. Mead was flurried and unable to reason clearly.

"I can't tell you much about what happened before the evening of Mr. Wyndhurst's disappearance, Miss Arnold. A young lady came to see him once, but she would not give her name; it was evening and she wore a thick veil. All I can say is that she seemed very upright—perky in her manner, too. I believe Mr. Wyndhurst met her elsewhere and had been on intimate terms with her. Mr. Wyndhurst has been worried lately, I am sure of that! Well, the night before last he didn't come home and a telegram came from him, as I have told the police. But I didn't tell them that I went out after the telegram came and when I got home, rather late, I found that someone had been in! Oh, I was sure of that; you see, I am very particular how I arrange my things and I hate to see chairs and mats and other things crooked. Now, the mat inside the front door was crooked! Of course, I never left it like that!"

"What does that indicate?" asked Marian judicially.

"Someone had been in, someone who didn't wish me to know it, and so had been extra particular about wiping his feet! He, or she, had shifted the mat in wiping his feet so much! I didn't pay any attention at first, thinking it was Mr. Wyndhurst come home, after all. So I went to his room and found it locked. It is never locked unless he is in bed. I left him alone till the morning, but as he didn't come out and didn't answer my knocks, I got a duplicate key which I keep in a drawer and opened the door. He wasn't there and the bed hadn't been slept in!"

"Well?" inquired Marian, with a trace of eagerness and anxiety.

Mr. Wyndhurst had been in his room and had changed his suit. He had taken one suit from the drawer and had put the other, the one he wore when he left in the morning, back in the drawer again. And in changing he dropped something on the floor without noticing it. I'll show you."

She went away and returned a minute later with a small stamp-photograph of a young woman. It was at the time when these little novelties were in vogue and many persons stuck them on letters to friends. Marian Arnold examined the picture critically and a pang of jealousy shot through her; she shut out the feeling in an instant, feeling ashamed of her momentary defection. The woman was strikingly beautiful, and even this little imperfect picture corroborated Mrs. Mead's statement that she was very upright. Mechanically she turned it over; on the back was written "24 B. W." Those were Brian's initials, but it was not his handwriting, and what did the figures mean? Were they part of some cipher? The idea of a cipher occurred to her because Brian was fond of codes and ciphers, and they had amused themselves in their own correspondence with that kind of thing.

Mrs. Mead regarded all this as evidence of Brian's culpability, although she was loth to believe in it. Marian was puzzled by this last discovery, but she was more than ever of opinion that there was a plot against Brian. She soon quitted Mrs. Mead's parlour and hurried to the office of Morgan and Sons, where she saw the head of the firm.

Mr. John Morgan received her sympathetically; he had seen her before, and thought that she was likely to make Brian a sensible, loving wife; but this interview increased his admiration. She surprised him by her resolute air and keen insight. His feelings were the same as those of Mrs. Mead; he desired with all his strength to believe in Brian's innocence, but appearances were against the young man. He said so.

"It is wrong, Mr. Morgan! I am certain there is some plot and we shall prove it!" she cried vehemently. "At least, *I* will prove it, if others cannot. Love can succeed where mere official duty fails!"

"Really, Miss Arnold, you make me feel quite glad!" exclaimed the elderly man, taking her hand and pressing it warmly. "I entertain the greatest affection for Brian, and this affair—has—upset me!"

There were tears in his eyes when he ceased speaking, and he had to cough violently in order to recover his self-possession.

"Tell me the latest information," requested Marian. "Were the originals of the telegrams written by him?"

"It is his style, but not quite like his handwriting," replied Mr. Morgan. "It looks as if he were much agitated. The letter introducing the messenger to the bank was typewritten; the messenger himself had the appearance that seemed a mixture of femininity and masculinity, and he was dressed——"

Here Marian interrupted him, giving a description of the second suit, according to Mrs. Mead's words, and before Mr. Morgan could do more than exclaim "That's it!" she produced the stamp-photograph. "I should like the bank cashier to say if the messenger's features resemble those," she cried in agitation.

Then she told him all she had discovered. Mr. Morgan was amazed; but he pointed out sorrowfully that the police would take it all as further evidence of guilt.

"Never mind!" cried Marian warmly. "Let us get to the bottom of it, and we shall see. Have you got that typewritten letter?"

"The police have it, but I have a press copy and am studying it."

In response to her request he showed the copy.

"There is no doubt that it was done on one of my machines," he told her. "You will see that the bottom of the "n" is broken towards the end of the letter. The clerk who generally uses the machine discovered the break yesterday morning."

"You have a clerk named Jackson," said Marian quietly. "He can use the typewriter, but is not good at it and is not a correspondence clerk. He only uses one sort of machine. Was that letter written on that particular machine?"

Morgan reflected. Yes; he remembered the facts mentioned by Marian. It was the same machine.

"And he wrote that letter!" whispered Marian, leaning

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towards Mr. Morgan, as if afraid that even a whisper might be heard. "Brian has told me of one peculiarity of Jackson's typing and letter-writing; he always begins the first word of the letter under the "r" of 'Dear,' whereas most people begin farther in, so that the 'Dear Sir' stand quite clear. This letter is written in that way."

Mr. Morgan jumped excitedly from his chair. Touching the bell, he ordered the letter-book to be brought to him; an examination of the copies failed to reveal a single letter arranged in that way.

"That clerk must be watched and this portrait shown to the bank cashier and the police," said Mr. Morgan decisively. "Miss Arnold, we may hope yet."

"Yes," returned Marian slowly, "unless—unless they have murdered him."

"Heaven forbid!" said Mr. Morgan solemnly.

Two days elapsed, but the detectives, although they said they had an important clue, had arrived at no result. Marian herself had done some amateur detective work, but without success.

It was on the evening of the fourth day since Brian's disappearance that two people sat facing each other at a table in a fashionable restaurant; they were in a quiet corner and the place was almost empty, so they could talk freely in low tones. They were Jackson, Mr. Morgan's ledger clerk, and a woman who bore a striking resemblance to the stamp-photograph.

"I don't like this hanging about, Alice!" said Jackson moodily. "You doubled from Charing Cross to Calais with a Paris ticket; then went to Boulogne and came back in another guise. The police have traced you in that suit to Calais, but as you changed into feminine attire they lost you there. But I think that visit to Wyndhurst's lodgings and the change of suits was unnecessary."

"It made the case looker blacker against Brian, and that's what I wanted! I hate him for having refused me for that chit of a girl, and I have a dash of Spanish blood in my veins. When we have debts to pay, we pay them!"

There was such a fiendish glitter in her eyes that the weak-minded Jackson felt uncomfortable. He was in love with the beautiful demon; he couldn't help himself; and she had promised to marry him if he assisted her to have revenge on Brian.

"I have had revenge on him and on her at the same time with a goodly sum of money into the bargain!" she laughed. "They both suffer, and I glory in it! I have disgraced him! Oh, it is a splendid revenge!"

"It's too risky!" declared Jackson. "You were nearly caught by the landlady and you left the door locked. And I tell you, I'm confoundedly uncomfortable. It has just leaked out that you dropped a stamp-photograph on the floor!"

The woman said something angrily under her breath, and her manner was less easy.

"It's time we cleared out! You promised to marry me and that we should go to Mexico, where you had property. When are you going to carry out that promise? And where is my share of the £1,000? I ran a lot of risk!"

In her inmost consciousness the woman despised him, but he was a useful tool, and she had fooled him with a promise which she never intended to keep. She half regretted that she had returned to England, but she wanted to do further harm to Marian Arnold.

"All in good time!" she returned coolly. "I want to get Miss Arnold into the clutches of those who hold her lover, and then we will be off."

"Look here!" cried Jackson, paling. "I don't like this sort of thing. I hadn't any idea that you wanted to kill Wyndhurst, and I can't help to settle her as well! I can't!"

"I don't want you to!" said the woman scornfully. "Meet me at Dover two nights hence. You can travel by the nine o'clock from Charing Cross; I shall go sooner!"

After a few more remarks they left the restaurant. Alice Barfield was maturing a plot for the destruction of Marian, which she hoped to accomplish on the following evening.

But the best-laid plans go wrong at times, partly because the plotters have too much confidence in themselves. Alice Barfield planned to send someone to Marian on the next night with a mysterious message from Brian that would tempt Marian to venture into a trap; but on the next morning there arrived from Paris at the office of Morgan and Sons a note in Brian's handwriting to Mr. Morgan. It was to tell him that it was useless to search for the runaway, as he was beyond the arm of the law, and that to seek him would be to bring much greater disgrace on all concerned. That letter, which Alice had forced (as she thought) from the unwilling and desperate Brian under threat of a horrible death, was a terrible blow to John Morgan. It seemed to confirm his worst suspicions; in a hopeless sort of way he sent for Marian Arnold, and held the letter to her without a word.

Marian read it eagerly; she studied it excitedly; then, to Morgan's consternation, she waved it aloft with a triumphant laugh.

"He is not in Paris and he has not absconded!" she cried. "I can see that this letter was forced from him in order to throw us off the track; but an idea seized Brian and he finally consented, pretending to be unwilling all the time. He guessed that I might see the letter, and if I did that I should be able to read the cipher."

"Cipher!" echoed the bewildered John Morgan. "I see no hidden message or cryptogram. You're dreaming, my dear."

"Read every fourth letter in those words," said Marian, handing him the writing. "Every fourth letter written there goes to form a hidden message, and that message explains the figures and letters on the back of the stamp-photograph! He is kept a prisoner at 24 Bath Walk! Where is that?"

"Phew! About the worst street in the Metropolis, or in that part of it."

"We must rescue him at once!" said Marian. "They may kill him!"

The police counselled waiting till dark, and so it happened that while Alice was arranging to entice Marian into the same den, the girl was waiting near Bath Walk while a number of detectives raided the house and rescued Brian Wyndhurst, exhausted by exposure, ill-treatment, and anxiety, from the hands of the rascals who had been only too ready to do as Alice Barfield wished for a few pounds.

Alice, on learning from her female emissary, that Marian was out, had been seized by some misgiving; but instead of fleeing she had foolishly hastened to Bath Walk, where she was arrested just as Brian was released. She had the mortification, and fitting punishment, of seeing the meeting of the lovers.

Brian was taken to Mr. Morgan's home, where he received every attention.

The remainder of the plot was soon made public property. Brian had accepted an invitation and urgent request from Jackson to accompany him to a conversazione at a workmen's institute; but that was a ruse to get him into a lonely place.

He was drugged and conveyed to Bath Walk, and his keys were taken from him. He was stripped, and, on regaining consciousness, had to put on some loathsome clothing. Jackson took the office key and the key of the safe, while the woman took the key of his lodgings. It was Jackson who forged the signatures.

Jackson, on being arrested, volunteered all the information which the police wanted, but he gained little thereby. He was sentenced to two years' penal servitude. Alice Barfield suffered a heavier sentence, but she walked from the dock defiantly, unrelenting.

The bulk of the £1,000 was never recovered, but Mr. Morgan was not much troubled about it. As for Brian and Marian, they had suffered, but it had intensified their love, and, after a while, they even felt a little sorry for the accomplices who were wearing away some of the best years of their life in prison.

G. Merriam.

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This Bale contains Pair Full-sized heavy Whitney Blankets, 1 quilt, red and white, blue and white; White Honeycomb Marcella or Red Twill your choice; Pair Full-size White Twill Sheets, 2 Pillow Cases, 1 Bolster Case, 5 Toilet Mats, 1 Toilet Cover, 2 Turkish Towels, Pair Fine Lace Curtains, 1 White Table Cloth, 1 Fringed Damask Table Cover, 6 Dusters, 2 Tea Cloths—28 Articles 49/6. How to pay. Send 6/- only, we send Bale, carriage paid for approval; balance can be paid in six monthly payments of 6/-, and one of 7/6. If you pay balance on receipt, send only 38/6, saving 5/-. Address below.

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12/6 Lady's handsome 18-carat gold-cased Keyless Watch, jewelled movement; exact timekeeper, 10 years' warranty; also fashionable long watch-guard, same quality (stamped and guaranteed) elegant West-End pattern the two together.

14/9 Furs.—Magnificent Alexandra Dagmar necklet and muff; beautiful real Russian sable hair, worth 4 guineas, not been worn; sacrifice for 14 9; approval willingly.

19/6 Genuine Italian Mandoline, by Stridente, Naples; fine tone; 21 ribbed, real rosewood, pearl and tortoiseshell inlaid, in saddler-made case; approval.

8/9 Feather Boas; bankrupt stock; special bargains; real Ostrich Feather Boas, beautifully curly; perfectly new, in box; colours: grey and white black and white, and natural.

10/6 Lustrous diamond and ruby Half-hoop Ring, set with 5 matchless doublet rubies and 8 real diamonds; solid gold, hall-marked.

7/6 Curb Chain Bracelet, with paddock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case.

6/9 Brooch; very handsome 18-carat rolled gold, 3 swallows in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls in case.

21/- Lady's solid gold Keyless Watch, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case; splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.

8/6 Fashionable Long Neck-chain; genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), beautifully finished; very choice design.

9/6 Organ Toned Melodeon; magnificent 26/- instrument. 12-fold bellows (metal bound), 3 sets steel bronze reeds, and 4 acting stops, including Tremolo and Diapason action; rich powerful tone, perfect order.

9/6 Necklet with Heart Pendant, very pretty Princess of Wales rope pattern; heart set with pearls and turquoise.

12/6 Magnificent 5-row Pearl Collarette; finest quality, mounted with four bars of lustrous Orient diamonds, in velvet-lined case.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to 'Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*']*

Should Love Affairs be Kept Secret?

"SHOULD a girl tell her friends her love affairs?" inquires "GERTY." "I am just dying to confide in somebody my troubles and joys over my own affairs, but do not know whether it would not be unkind to my lover to make him a topic of conversation among other girls."

* * * * *

You are very wise and discreet, "GERTY." Certainly love affairs should not be the subject of "tittle-tattle." It is very unkind to a man to make him so pointed an object of interest to a lot of girls he does not know. If, however, you have one friend whom you can trust, I think you would be doing yourself much good by seeking her advice or consolation. Such feelings gain nothing by being "bottled up."

The Girl About Town.

"THE girl I am fond of," writes "GUS," "is a business girl, who attends an evening class three times a week. This means that she has to journey across town every night at a late hour. I am very nervous of her making these trips alone, yet could scarcely offer to see her home every night, as that would attract too much attention. Besides, I live in lodgings at the other end of the town. How would you advise me to act?"

* * * * *

I should change my lodgings, "GUS," and go to the neighbourhood in which she lives, if that is possible. If she is willing, there would then be nothing pointed about your seeing her home, as in any case you would be going that way. Neither need you always go to the door of her home, and thereby cause her embarrassment. Certainly a girl does need some kind of escort in crossing a big city late at night.

Should a Girl Tell Her Past?

"THE man who is now my *fiancé*," writes "ANNIE," "thinks that he is the only man who has ever kissed me. I have not denied this, but, as a matter of fact, I have had more than one previous love affair. Now to tell him this would, I fear, disturb his affection for me. Ought I, do you think, to tell him all about things, or should I leave it till later on?"

* * * * *

I think it is better to be candid now. It would be far better for him to know at the beginning all about your past affairs than to suddenly find out that you have been concealing things from him. It may be a blow to break the news to him, but if you do it carefully, he ought to be made to see that it is not unnatural that you should have attracted others. Besides he will afterwards admire you the more for being open with him, and what man is there whose vanity is not gratified by the thought that he has carried off in triumph a girl whom others have failed to win?

Asking a Girl Home.

"I AM very friendly with a certain girl," writes "CHARLIE," "but do not wish to propose to her until my people know her and like her. However, I do not quite know how this is to be managed, as I understand it is not etiquette for a man to invite a girl home without some chaperone."

* * * * *

"CHARLIE" is very sensible in his ideas. Certainly he had better postpone proposing until he has the approval of his family. As to inviting the girl to his home, "CHARLIE" should certainly include in the invitation one of her relations, her mother, sister, or brother, so as to place the affair on a formal social basis.

Friendship—Not Love.

"I AM very 'gone' on a certain man," writes "HELEN," "but every time we have discussed love and marriage, he has told me that on no account could he allow himself to go further with a girl than friendship. He pretends that he disapproves of marriage and says he will remain a bachelor. What am I to do to overcome such a feeling on his part?"

* * * * *

If you are really in love with him you have certainly done a good deal in winning the friendship of a man who poses as a woman-hater. In time, perhaps, you will persuade him to alter his views. But on no account try to draw him by petty devices, as such men are rarely attracted that way. Enjoy his friendship, and hope that in time something riper will result.

Not Jealous Enough.

"I AM worried, perhaps for a very absurd reason," writes "J. K. T." "My sweetheart is not a bit jealous. Whenever I talk of other girls I know, or have met, she just takes an interest in them, but never seems to be afraid of my carrying matters too far. Now do you think such a girl can be really fond of me? Is not jealousy a proper part of love?"

* * * * *

You are to be congratulated on having so very sensible a sweetheart. Evidently she has such perfect trust in you that the idea of your being unfaithful has never crossed her mind. No, jealousy is not a proper part of love. It is a very unpleasant and foolish passion, which does far more harm than good. However, don't try too hard to excite such feelings in your sweetheart. She might be deluded into jealousy, and such girls rarely forgive tricks.

Angling for Brothers.

"MOLLY" writes: "For some time I and my parents have lived in a small country village, where we have only very rarely been asked to visit our neighbours. It is six months since we last visited a certain family where there are five girls. The other day, a brother of mine (unmarried) returned from abroad. The day after his arrival we received an invitation to visit the family in question. How do you think I ought to view such proceedings?"

* * * * *

Evidently that family of girls had a business eye on your brother. It is, however, exceedingly rude and clumsy of them to show it quite so pointedly. To neglect you for six months, and then only ask you as a sort of cover for your brother, shows that they cannot be very desirable people to cultivate. You should decline the invitation, and save your brother from young ladies whose keenness to meet him is so badly disguised. At any rate, leave it to him to say whether or not he wishes to make their acquaintance.

Cynthia

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1. *Who wrote Robinson Crusoe?*
2. *What famous British soldier is known as "Bobs"?*
3. *Who is your favourite hero (not fiction), and why?*
4. *Who made most runs in first-class cricket this summer?*
5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born. Give year and day?*

The Second Set of Questions will appear in THE BOYS' LEADER (1d. every Tuesday), on Tuesday, November 10.

It will be noticed that some of the questions call for an expression of opinion only, and others you will have to search for in books.

Cut out and paste these questions on a sheet of foolscap paper numbering it No. 1. Write your reply to No. 1. immediately below, and then follow with No. 2, and so on, saying in what book you found the information and who helped you to find it.

Anybody may help you provided you say who. No competitor must be over 21 years of age. No reply must exceed fifty words. Keep all replies until the last set appears and until we tell you to send them in. Write plainly in ink on one side of the paper.

HINTS

Most towns and even villages have now a Reference Library, so it will be easy to get access to books.
Parents and friends may be able to tell you many of the replies, and you can use this information provided you tell us how you obtained it.
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The two successful competitors will be given the choice, after we have arranged with their parents, of entering one of the following departments of our offices:—The Editorial Department, the Art Department, the Counting House.
Should the winners live outside London, we have no doubt we shall be able to arrange with their parents as to their residence.
At all events, here is an opportunity for some boy and some girl to put their feet on the first rung of Fortune's Ladder, and we hope every parent who has his child's interest at heart will make an effort on their behalf.

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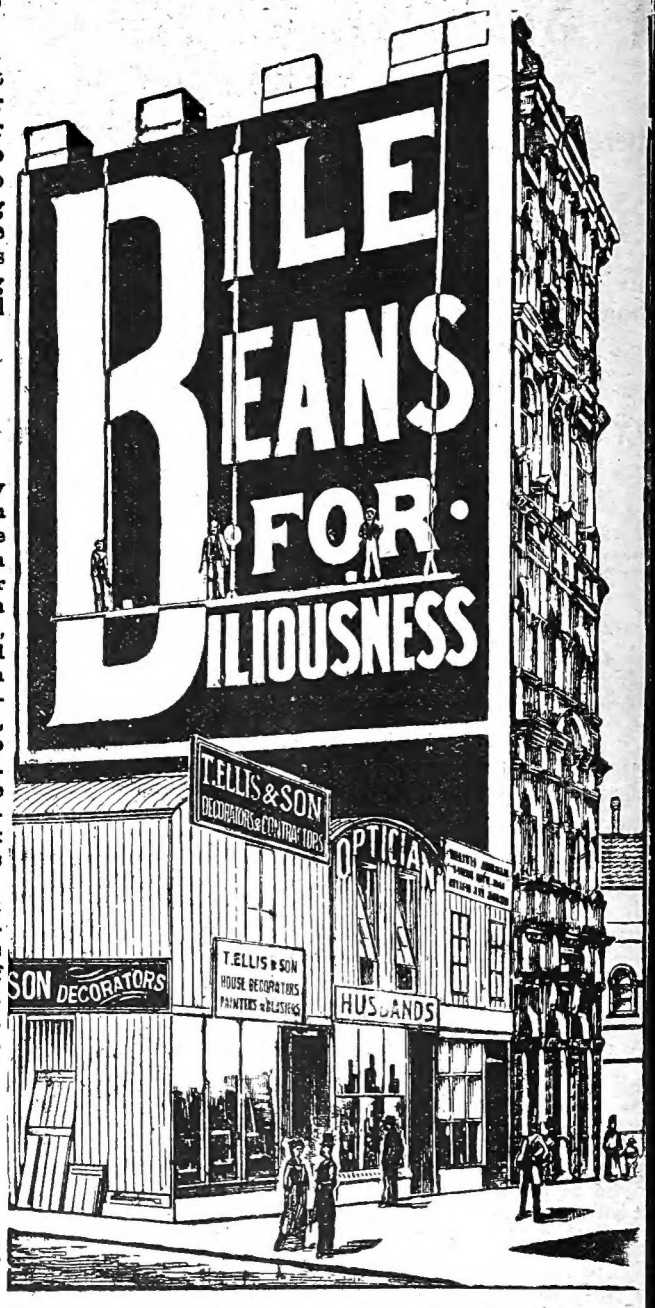
THE accompanying sketch depicts a huge advertisement of the Bile Bean Manufacturing Company in Australia. The largest letter—the now world-famous "B"—stands forty feet in height, and compared with it the men of average height on the scaffolding appear to be mere pigmies. Bile Beans' most telling advertisement, however, is to be found inside the houses of the people, where the great army who have been benefited by them sing their praises and recommend them to others who suffer as they once did. The fame of Bile Beans has so far spread, and the manufacture of them so greatly increased, that the making and purveying of Bile Beans for Biliousness is now one of the largest medicinal enterprises in the world. This gigantic sign is a wonder of the advertising world. Bile Beans are a wonder of the medicinal world.



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"At last I decided to give Bile Beans a trial. Soon after beginning with them I felt I was improving, so I persevered. The relief I gained was marvellous, and after a short course I found myself quite restored to health. I can now eat any kind of food with relish, and I am never more pleased than when I am recommending to other sufferers the medicine which cured me."

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